

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: THE NEED
FOR COMPREHENSIVE PAID LEAVE FOR
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND BEYOND

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
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LEADING BY EXAMPLE: THE NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE PAID LEAVE FOR THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE AND BEYOND

Thursday, June 24, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM,
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:13 a.m., via Zoom, Hon. Carolyn Maloney [chairwoman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Maloney, Norton, Lynch, Connolly, Raskin, Mfume, Ocasio-Cortez, Tlaib, Porter, Bush, Davis, Welch, Johnson, Sarbanes, Speier, Kelly, Lawrence, DeSaulnier, Gomez, Pressley, Comer, Foxx, Hice, Grothman, Cloud, Higgins, Norman, Sessions, Keller, Biggs, Clyde, Franklin, Fallon, Herrell, and Donalds.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The committee will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Today, we will discuss the dire need for comprehensive paid leave in the United States, and the steps Congress can take to meet that need.

In 2019, Congress passed my landmark legislation guaranteeing paid parental leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child for more than 2 million Federal employees.

This was a huge step forward. There were only two countries in the world, the United States and Papua New Guinea, that did not provide at that time paid leave for the birth of a child.

With the passage of this bill, it put the government in a strong position to recruit and retain a talented, diverse work force. But we cannot rest now because there is much more work to be done.

We need to build on this historic achievement by bringing the Federal Government's employment policies in line with leading companies in the private sector and, indeed, the rest of the world.

That is why in January, I introduced H.R. 564, the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act. This bill would finally provide Federal employees with comprehensive paid family and medical leave. That means employees would have access to paid leave if they get sick, need to care for an ill family member, or need to miss work due to family members' military deployment.

The Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees unpaid leave for these reasons, but unpaid leave is untenable for too many Federal

workers. This is a policy that is long overdue for the Federal work force and for our Nation.

The Federal Government has the opportunity to lead the way on paid leave and fostering a family friendly workplace. While providing access to paid parental leave was critically important and long overdue, it is just as important to provide access to paid family and medical leave, too.

Illnesses and military deployments are not events that can be planned for. As we have all learned in the past year, illness can strike any of us at any time. It is fair—is it fair? Let me ask you, is it fair to ask workers to make an agonizing choice between caring for a family member or continuing to receive a paycheck?

The answer, clearly and unequivocally, is no. These are choices that no one should have to make. The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated dramatically and undeniably the need for paid family leave. Too many Americans lacked access to paid family leave during the pandemic with devastating consequences. Expanding access to paid leave is a large part of a strong and equitable recovery.

Just as importantly, after a year of global pandemic that has killed 600,000 Americans, why do we tolerate policies that actually create an incentive for workers to come to work sick because they cannot afford to take unpaid time off?

Does anyone seriously believe that this is good public policy? Our committee has been working hard to fix these problems.

We championed a provision of the American Rescue Plan that established a \$570 million fund in the U.S. Treasury to provide up to 15 weeks of paid coronavirus-related leave for all Federal employees, including postal workers and others that are on the front line of providing services to Americans.

This was an essential component of our Nation's response to the pandemic. But paid leave is just as important for workers facing any kind of family health crisis.

That is why we are proposing to take the necessary next steps by providing paid family and medical leave for all Federal employees.

Let us be clear, paid leave would benefit both workers and employers. You don't have to take my word for it. Today we will hear from a small business employer on why this policy is, in fact, good for business.

Employers in states that have adopted a paid leave program, largely report that it is more convenient to administer and improves competitiveness. In fact, support for national paid leave policy among both large and small businesses is quickly growing.

The Federal Government, as the largest employer in the Nation, can and must serve as an example in creating a family friendly workplace. According to a 2018 survey by the National Partnership for Women and Families, 84 percent of Americans support paid family and medical leave, including large majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans.

I have introduced versions of this bill since 2000, often with Republican support. This should be an issue that has the kind of bipartisan support in Washington that it has throughout the entire country.

H.R. 564 is an investment in the people who keep the government running. We all have an interest in strengthening the Federal work force and making sure that the Federal Government is an employer that attracts and retains top talent.

I am encouraged that President Biden and Vice President Harris have made universal paid leave a cornerstone of their ambitious American Families Plan. In addition to establishing a national paid leave program, the American Families Plan would make childcare more affordable, invest in early and post-secondary education, and make permanent tax credits that help working families, like the child tax credit. These provisions would build the infrastructure needed to bolster economic recovery and help American families.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress on both sides of the aisle to advance the administration's plan to help families emerge from the pandemic stronger and more financially secure for the future.

The Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act is one piece of the vision the administration has laid out. It will strengthen the Federal work force over the long term, and it is a roadmap for the Federal Government to lead by example in creating a fair and safe workplace for American families.

With that, I recognize the distinguished ranking member from the great state of Kentucky, Mr. Comer, for his opening statements.

MR. COMER. Well, thank you, Madam Chair.

Today's hearing, ironically, is titled "Leading by Example." But this committee is holding the hearing remotely when we could walk down the hallway and meet in person to conduct committee business just like Judiciary did last night, which is next door to the House Oversight Committee.

Americans across the country are going back to work. D.C. restaurants are open at full capacity now. Cases have dramatically dropped across the Nation and Members of Congress can all gather on the House floor at the same time.

But this committee, under Democrat leadership, refuses to meet in person to do its work and, instead, hides behind computer screens. This goes against science, it goes against common sense, and this is not leading by example.

Madam Chair, it is past time for the committee to work in person like just about every other committee in Washington. We do better work in person. We must lead by example and get back to normal operations, just like most Americans are expected to do.

Moving on to today's committee hearing, Oversight Democrats have called a hearing on enhanced work perks for Federal bureaucrats. That's right.

More benefits for Federal employees who already enjoy job security and a lavish set of benefits not afforded to most American workers.

This follows the Biden administration's recent announcement delaying the Federal work force's return to the workplace, despite most Americans being expected to show up for work.

Meanwhile, hard-working Americans across the country are still recovering from the economic impacts of Democrat lockdowns and

our Nation is facing many crises due to President Biden's disastrous policies.

The Oversight Committee's time would be better spent focused on our committee's mission of identifying and preventing government waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement, and ensuring the government is transparent and accountable to the American people.

Unlike Democrats, Republicans have been focused on fulfilling our committee's mission. On February 11, 133 days ago, Republicans called for a hearing on massive unemployment fraud in California, where benefits were sent to murderers on death row, deceased individuals, and organized crime members in China and Russia.

Chairwoman Maloney refused to hold a hearing on this gross mismanagement of taxpayer dollars, and now, it is reported that 400 billion dollars in pandemic assistance unemployment benefits were stolen, with as much as half the funds going to international crime organizations.

Last week, Republicans called for a hearing on the heist of the century, but the chairwoman has not responded, unfortunately, to our hearing request.

On February 24, 124 days ago, Republicans called on Chairwoman Maloney to compel New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to testify under oath regarding his deadly order sending COVID-positive patients to nursing homes, and his subsequent cover-up.

This is a gross abuse of power and Governor Cuomo must be held accountable for his actions that resulted in the death of thousands of senior citizens. But have Democrats subpoenaed Governor Cuomo, let alone called a hearing on this issue? No.

On February 25, 123 days ago, Republicans called for a hearing on reopening America's schools. Ongoing virtual school has harmed students' well-being. Failing grades, mental health issues, and suicides are up across the board.

Since we called for a hearing, we have learned that President Biden's CDC allowed a radical teachers union to interfere in its scientific guidance, effectively recommending 90 percent of schools remain shuttered.

Now that the school year has ended, only about half of public schools finished up the school year fully in person. Have Democrats held a hearing on this pressing issue which threatens to set back a generation of kids? No.

On March 4, 112 days ago, Republicans called on Democrats to hold a hearing on President Biden's border crisis. We renewed our request two additional times since then.

Since President Biden assumed office, masses of children have been held in overcrowded facilities during a pandemic and past the legal timeframe. Apprehensions at the Southwest border are at a 21-year high. The human smuggling industry is booming and deadly drugs like fentanyl are pouring across our border.

This is the very definition of government mismanagement and is ripe for congressional oversight. The Democrats held multiple hearings on conditions at the border and conducted several site visits to border facilities during the Trump administration. But now that a Democrat occupies the White House, crickets. Nothing.

On April 26, 59 days ago, Republicans called for a hearing on Mayor Bowser's solitary confinement of D.C. inmates. Under the excuse of pandemic precautions, inmates, essentially, have been held in universal solitary confinement as they are confined to their cells for 23 hours a day.

This has resulted in severe effects on the inmates including many sleeping at odd hours of the day, talking to themselves, others growing extensive beards and hair because the barber shop is closed.

This government abuse should be investigated, especially since it is happening in the district which is under this committee's jurisdiction. The Democrats have failed to address this issue.

On May 24, Republicans called for an investigation into the Wuhan lab leak. There is evidence Communist China started the pandemic, covered it up, and is responsible for the deaths of almost 600,000 Americans and millions more worldwide.

These questions are not a diversion, as Speaker Pelosi has stated. They get to the truth and accountability. And what is the Democrat's response? They are too busy investigating the Trump administration to have time to determine the origination of the COVID pandemic.

And last week, Republicans called for a hearing on the massive leak of sensitive taxpayer information from the IRS. This committee has a history of conducting strong oversight over government officials at the IRS who abuse their position for political gain while thwarting congressional accountability and oversight.

This committee must convene a hearing with Biden administration officials to understand who is responsible for these leaks of sensitive tax information.

We must also determine what effects, if any, the administration has taken to prevent this from ever happening again. We are awaiting a response from the distinguished chairwoman.

Madam Chair, it is past time for this committee to get back to its primary mission. We have already dramatically expanded paid leave for the Federal work force.

Today's hearing to consider expanding paid leave even further for Federal workers shows Democrats' priorities are incredibly distorted.

The American people are concerned about the ongoing border crisis, abuses of power in government, getting their kids back to school, and the rising cost of goods and services, better known as inflation.

We need to put the American people first, not the special interest of Federal bureaucrats.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The chair recognizes herself to respond to my dear friend and colleague from the other side of the aisle.

I doubt that the women in the great state of Kentucky think that having a child is a, quote, "perk." It is not a perk, and too many of us have been fired, fired, thrown out of the room, told not to come back because you dared to have a child.

Many women have sick children, and when they are sick, they need their mother. If your child is traumatized, if your child is sick,

what's wrong with giving them paid leave to be there to be with them?

We both know that most women have to work. Most women have to work. Most families depend on two incomes. They can't make it on one income.

I have—I have Federal employees call me asking, when is the bill going to pass so I can have a child? I can't even afford to have a child, because they are going to be fired. They are not going to be paid when they are out with their child, and they need to be with their child in those critical first weeks of life. This is not a perk we are talking about.

My brother was in Vietnam. When he was deployed, it was traumatic to his family. They would have liked to have been with him. They would have liked the time to adjust with three small children. But he was sent into the war zone.

So, I mean, deployment of our military is serious business. It is not a perk. It's a—it's a crisis in most families, and what we are talking about is balanced policies that I will say that most countries in the world already have, even Third World countries. We are the greatest country in the world. Can't we respect our workers?

And I would like to respond to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that are always very protective of the private sector, and I am too. They are very important. They pay all the taxes for this country.

But the private sector is far ahead of the public sector in how they treat their employees. They have in-building daycare centers. They have a birthing—they have milking centers.

They have support. They have paid leave. They have, you know, working from your home leave. They have all of these things that the Federal Government does not have.

And let me tell you, when I had my first child and went to Personnel to talk about leave, they said leave. We just want you to leave. I said, I don't want to leave. They said, you will be the first person in the history of this establishment that has had a baby and come back.

I said I am coming back. They said, well, you can apply for disability. I said, having a child is not a disability. It is a joy. It is a family value. It is something we should celebrate, not punish women for. We should celebrate them. Give them the support that they so justly deserve in our society.

We talk about family values. Where are they? My whole life I have fought for a balance between work and family because I suffered it in my own family. Only recently are people seriously talking about it.

When President Biden announced it, I felt like I had died and gone to heaven, that all of these issues that I had cared about, work/family balance, were being talked about, seriously, by the President of the United States.

It is our job to try to implement them and that is what we are doing today. And if you do a study comparing the private sector to the public sector, the private sector is doing a much better job in adjusting and really doing work/family balance within their companies. Most of them have paid leave. Most of them have on-campus

daycare. Most of them have all kinds of services for their employees and the Federal Government needs to keep pace.

We know that we can't pay the same salary as the private sector. We know that. We have to find people that are committed to public service. But we also have to help them balance their families with the work that they have.

I now recognize the——

Mr. COMER. Madam Chair, with all due respect—with all due respect——

Chairwoman MALONEY. Reclaiming my time.

Mr. COMER. No, Madam Chair. You went way over your time. You went way, way over your time. No.

Madam Chair, what the Democrats don't understand [inaudible] are employees, too, and if employers can't get people to come to work because——

Mr. RASKIN. Regular order. Regular order.

Chairwoman MALONEY.—paid family leave.

Mr. COMER. You don't understand. There is a disconnect. You are living in——

Mr. HIGGINS. Someone put the chair in order, please. Will the—— will the chair restore order?

Mr. COMER. The taxpayers are sick and tired of giving more benefits and more perks to Federal employees because they have to pay for those benefits and perks.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chairwoman?

Mr. COMER. And you want to raise their taxes even more.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Parliamentary inquiry, Madam Chairwoman.

Am I recognized?

Chairwoman MALONEY. Mr. Connolly—Mr. Connolly, you are now recognized for two minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chairwoman, and I thank the chairwoman for holding this important hearing. And I add my voice to hers how saddened I am at the diminution of this critical issue by the ranking member and all too many of his colleagues on the other side of the aisle, and the desire to distract us from the disastrous policies of the four Trump years, including, I might add, their management of the pandemic, which is nothing short of catastrophic and tragic and cost hundreds of thousands of lives.

I guess the ranking member doesn't want us to remember that the president, President Trump, actually advised people to consider the ingestion of Clorox and other disinfectant.

Mr. HIGGINS. Lie. Lie. That is a lie and you know it.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chairwoman—Madam Chairwoman, I have the floor.

And, you know, you can shout lie on it. That doesn't make it true. In fact, he did say that. It was publicly seen. So, I am saddened by the attempt to somehow distract us from the subject of this hearing.

In fact, I was proud to hold the first hearing on this issue on your behalf, Madam Chairwoman, and proud to serve as an ally with you in the effort to renew our commitment to helping families meet the increasing demands of parenthood and family caregiving responsibilities.

The Comprehensive Paid Leave and Federal Employees Act, H.R. 564, continues our committee's effort to support civil servants and their families.

Paid family leave would ensure the Federal Government is the model instead of the, you know, laggard in protecting families and our employees who work so hard, especially during this pandemic, on behalf of the American people. They are not bureaucrats. They are dedicated public servants.

In September 2019, our subcommittee held——

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam Chairman, that time—that time has expired.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Chairwoman, I would ask a little indulgence because I had to seek recognition over the unrecognized——

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman may finish. The gentleman may finish.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chairwoman. And we were successful. But we made the victory lap short because there was more work to do. Today, we continue to fight for paid family care giving leave and leave to care for one's own medical needs.

The Comprehensive Paid Leave and Federal Employees Act would provide paid leave to Federal employees for reasons that, largely, mirror the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993, care for family, self, or other qualifying reasons that often surround active military duty.

Data show that paid family leave——

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam Chairman, the gentleman is not finishing his—finishing his sentence. He is continuing on, and the gentleman knows we are attempting to have regular order, not go through each and every person. And I would ask for two minutes when the gentleman does finish. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman makes a good point. Mr. Connolly, may we now move to Mr. Hice, and I will give you as much time at the end of the hearing to complete every statement plus the other time during the——

Mr. CONNOLLY. Of course, Madam Chairwoman.

Chairwoman MALONEY. I now recognize—OK. I now recognize Mr. Hice for two minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

And I would just say, too, it is time for us to meet in person. You cannot lead by fear, and other committees are meeting in person. We had Natural Resources in person yesterday. It is time that Oversight leads by example itself.

Republicans believe the Federal employees should get the job done for the American people and that they should be held accountable for doing so.

Under President Trump's executive orders, Federal employees could be held accountable. That is what the American people deserve and that is even what Federal employees themselves want.

Through his executive order on official time, he sought to ensure that Federal employees actually did the job they were hired to do—how novel—instead of doing what a union wants them to do.

Democrats, on the other hand, seem to care less about these things. A key component of the Democrat return-to-work plan is to

make sure as many Federal employees as possible don't actually have to come back to work.

What kind of a great idea is that? They are pushing permanent expanding—expanded telework, without understand what the impact has been, nor what it will be.

I, personally, have asked IGs across Federal agencies to conduct an assessment so that we could at least have some data on this. And now today, we are looking at ways to give Federal employees even more time off on the backs of the American taxpayer.

So, Democrats' agenda for the Federal work force issues could be summarized as this.

Here is the summary of the Democrats' plan. Come to work as little as possible, and when you do come don't worry about doing your job. That is where we are headed with this thing.

Congress just provided paid parental leave for Federal workers, and now the majority is trying to expand paid leave for all categories in the Family Medical Leave Act. Combined with Federal holidays and annual leave, Federal employees now only have to work about eight months out of the year. Eight months out a year.

Are you kidding me? This is absolute insanity, and this is what we are told is leading by example, getting where employees don't have to come to work for four months out of the year?

The majority doesn't even know how much this program is going to cost. Oh, but I can tell you who is going to pay the cost. It will be the American taxpayer. The majority doesn't even know the consequences of this.

The Biden administration has released a tidal wave of wasteful and unnecessary pandemic aid that now threatens to swallow our country up in inflation and out of control spending.

Meanwhile, here in this committee, it appears as though we are trying to create some sort of Gilligan's Island so that we can insulate Federal workers from the issues that the rest of the world is facing.

Madam Chair, I would agree that it is time to lead by example both in having our meetings held in person, but also to have common sense to some of the issues that we bring as a topic of discussion for this committee.

And with that, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back. We now will move to witnesses and introductions.

Before I introduce our panelists, I want to recognize Mr. Welch from the great state of Vermont to introduce Mr. Sorkin, who is a constituent of his.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Very briefly, we are quite proud of our small businesses in Vermont, and I know that is true for Mr. Comer and my friend, Pete Sessions.

They are family affairs, and the folks who are going to testify, Eric Sorkin and his wife, Laura, have Runamok Maple. They have 75 employees, and they are taking maple syrup—and I would like to share some with some of my colleagues. Theirs is fantastic. It is really helping the Vermont economy.

They have 75 employees and one of them had cancer. His wife had cancer. He couldn't leave work because he was—he couldn't af-

ford to lose the paycheck and he was absolutely fearful about not having income. The Sorkins decided this doesn't work. This is like a family member.

And you know what? I know in Georgia, in Texas, all around, we have got these small businesses where it is like a family. They started a family leave policy, and they were able to support, at great expense to them, this family leave to let that partner take care of his partner.

So, they are going to testify about this, and we need to help our small businesses where it is enormous financial pressure to deal with their commitment to their own employees, who they regard as family.

So, I look forward to introducing Mr. Sorkin and working with the committee to see if we can make progress on family leave. Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you so much, Mr. Welch.

Our next with witnesses Everett Kelley, who is the national president of the American Federation of Government Employees.

Then we will hear from Vicki Shabo, who is a senior fellow for paid leave policy and strategy in the Better Life Lab at New America.

We also have Hadley Heath Manning, who is the director of policy at the Independent Women's Forum.

Finally, we will hear from Lelaine Bigelow, who is the interim vice president for economic justice and congressional relations at the National Partnership for Women and Families.

The witnesses will be unmuted so we can swear them in, please. Please raise your right hands.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[Witnesses are sworn.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. Let the record show that the witnesses answered in the affirmative. Thank you.

Without objection, your written statements will be part of the record.

With that, Mr. Kelley, you are now recognized for your testimony.

Mr. Kelley?

**STATEMENT OF EVERETT KELLEY, NATIONAL PRESIDENT,
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES**

Mr. KELLEY. OK, I think I am ready now.

Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and the members of the committee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on the importance of comprehensive paid family leave.

Today, I want to talk about the critical need for this benefit for Federal workers and how it will improve recruitment, retention, and employee morale.

I believe that caring for others is the very foundation of a Federal employee's decision to serve the American public.

AFGE represents Federal employees who inspect the food we eat and places we work. They protect citizens from the illicit flow of drugs, maintain the safety of our Nation's borders, care for our Na-

tion's veterans, serve as a vital link to Social Security recipients, you know, and keep the national defense system prepared for any danger, protecting the flying public, and respond to natural and manmade emergencies.

We greatly appreciate Chairwoman Maloney for introducing the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act to provide Federal employees with 12 weeks of family leave for all instances covered under the Family and Medical Leave Act, FMLA.

No Federal employee should ever have to choose between caring for a loved one and keeping his or her job. I have heard countless stories from AFGE members who have had to make the choice between being able to support their families financially or supporting a loved one, or taking care of themselves before they are ready to return to work.

I have heard stories from VA nurses, civilian defense employees, correctional officers, Social Security claims adjusters, EPA attorneys, and meat inspectors that is caring for their elderly grandparents, their parents, children, and spouses.

These hard-working civil servants provide care for loved ones suffering from Agent Orange exposure, cancer, traumatic brain injuries, and the consequences of accidents that no one saw coming.

Opponents have raised objections to the cost of providing paid leave to Federal employees. CBO last estimated the cost of the 2010 to 2014 period.

So, we don't know exactly how much it will cost today, but we estimate that it will be minimal compared to the cost of hiring and training new employees due to turnovers due to lack of comprehensive benefits.

Opponents also assert that Federal employees already have enough paid leave, and that they save it for emergencies or were more prudent in its use. It wouldn't be necessary to have paid family leave for their compensation.

Now, these arguments miss the point entirely, you know, of paid family leave. It is, you know, unpredictability of the circumstances when paid family leave might become necessary. That is the reason for the benefit.

Now, telling a Federal employee not to use sick or annual leave because of the possibility of medical disaster striking a family member ignores the very serious and the reasons of paid annual and sick leave existence in the first place.

If anyone doubted the value of paid sick leave prior to the pandemic, the risk to fellow workers of coming into work with a contagious disease should have changed their mind. COVID-19 is not the only virus that can spread at a workplace.

It is, clearly, in the interest of any employers, especially an employer who works or interacts with the public to allow workers to stay home when they are ill.

Thus, using annual leave for rest and use of sick leave for recuperation from illness would never be discouraged.

Emergencies don't happen to only those with decades of employment and the opportunity to accumulate stores of paid leave. They happen to any and everybody.

Federal employees are only able to accumulate a maximum of 30 days of annual leave, not enough time for other potential instances covered under FMLA.

By most conservative estimates, it would take a Federal worker who takes two weeks of annual leave and three weeks of sick leave per year close to five years to accrue enough sick and annual leave to receive pay during the 12 weeks of family leave allowed on FMLA.

Even if a Federal worker never got sick and never went on vacation, it would take over two years to accumulate enough leave to pay for 12 weeks of family leave. Paid family leave would undoubtedly improve recruitment and retention of talented workers who might leave for other jobs that provide such leave.

The Federal Government currently reimburses contractors and guarantees the cost of providing, you know, paid leave to their workers. Taxpayers are paying for this. If it is OK for contractors and those who get Federal grants, it should be OK for Federal employees.

The COVID pandemic showed the critical need for paid leave for Federal employees to be able to perform the mission of the agency and to have time for dependent care needs.

This concludes my statement. I will be happy to answer any question that you might have, and, again, thank you for the time that you have given me today on this most important issue.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.
Ms. Shabo, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF VICKI SHABO, SENIOR FELLOW, PAID LEAVE POLICY AND STRATEGY, BETTER LIFE LAB, ON BEHALF OF NEW AMERICA

Ms. SHABO. Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney. Good morning. Special thanks to you for your tireless leadership on Federal workers paid leave and FMLA expansions over many, many years, and thanks to members of the committee who have engaged thoughtfully in dialogs about paid leave since the committee's last hearing in 2019.

I am Vicki Shabo, a senior fellow for paid leave policy and strategy at New America's Better Life Lab, though the views I express here are my own.

The pandemic has shown us that we must do better in how public policies enable us to care for ourselves and one another, and it has underscored that universal paid leave is a must have.

Momentum toward expanding paid leave had been growing prior to the pandemic. Now, 10 states have adopted paid leave programs, but there are still more than 100 million workers left behind.

Just one in five private sector workers have access to paid family leave to care for a new child or a seriously ill loved one. Just two in five have access to employer-provided temporary disability insurance for a personal medical leave lasting weeks or months.

For family leave, there are huge disparities. Thirty-eight percent of the highest wage workers, but just five percent of the lowest wage workers, have access to paid family leave through their jobs, and access for those higher wage workers, while it has grown 20

percentage points in the last 10 years, for lower wage workers it has only grown two percentage points.

Too often, critics ask how can we afford a national paid family and medical leave program. But I think the question we have to ask instead is how can a country continue to bear enormous, unaffordable, and unsustainable costs of the status quo.

Lack of paid leave costs a typical family more than \$9,000. It reduces mother's earnings. It means hundreds of thousands of dollars lost in older workers' earnings and retirement savings. For businesses, it means losing workers, absorbing costs of turnover, and for smaller businesses, difficulty competing for talent.

For the economy, it contributes to \$500 billion lost annually.

Congress has made strides on paid leave in recent years, including the 12 weeks of paid parental leave for Federal workers and temporary limited measures put in place for the pandemic.

But now it is time for next steps. For Federal workers, I urge you to enact the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act to make the Federal Government a high-functioning employer of choice for four important groups of workers that will help make the Federal work force diverse and inclusive, and contribute to better inputs and better outcomes.

So, first, younger workers. Parental leave alone is not enough to attract younger workers to replace the large numbers of Federal employees who are at or approaching retirement age.

Generation X, Millennials, and Gen Z are all increasingly caring for older adults, and often for both children and older loved ones at the same time.

Second, women and people of color both bear disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, often in multi-generational households, and the Federal Government has a lot of work to do to attract these workers to be public servants. Just 43 percent of Federal workers are women, and workers of color are underrepresented at senior levels.

Third, hiring people with disabilities is a stated goal of the Federal Government, and paid leave is a workplace benefit that most lack. It could help to distinguish the Federal Government as an employer of choice while also mitigating stigma.

But we have to look beyond the Federal Government as an employer and focus on the Federal Government as an investor in people, businesses, and the economy. As we emerge from a deadly health crisis that has exacerbated gender, racial, and economic disparities and weakened the work force, it is time for paid leave for all as a national priority.

State-paid family leave experiences show us the value we can expect from a well-crafted, well-implemented national paid leave plan.

First, women's labor force participation, attachment, and increased earnings.

Second, children's improved health and healthcare utilization.

Third, men's greater engagement in the lives of children and families.

Fourth, better health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs for ill, injured, or disabled people and more economic security for their caregivers.

Fifth, savings to Medicaid, reduced need for SNAP and public assistance.

And sixth, retention benefits for businesses, especially small businesses.

The president's American Families Plan, the DeLauro Family Act, and Chairman Neal's Building an Economy for Families Act each propose public investments and paid leave for all working people, no matter where they live or work, their job, or their serious personal health or family care need. These proposals make available paid leave for everyone, comprehensive, neutral, gender equal paid leave with adequate wage replacement and inclusive definition of family.

Employers can do more. Nothing in these programs would limit their flexibility. Paid leave rewards work, strengthens people's attachment to the work force, and promotes employee retention.

The plans under consideration would reduce a worker's losses by up to 85 percent, compared to unpaid leave. National paid leave would boost GDP by up to \$2.4 trillion by enabling more people to work, and would boost demands for goods and services by increasing household incomes.

But at the end of the day, this is about values that unite us like love, responsibility, dignity, and care. It is about being by the side of a loved one who is dying or recovering, seeing a baby's first smile, or getting the medical treatment you need without sacrificing the well being of the family you love and support. Paid leave is not a pipe dream. It is not a luxury and it is not a necessity.

I look forward to working with you to make paid leave for all a reality. There is no time to waste, and I am excited to answer questions.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

Mr. Sorkin, you are now recognized for your testimony.

Mr. Sorkin?

**STATEMENT OF ERIC SORKIN, CO-OWNER AND CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER, RUNAMOK MAPLE**

Mr. SORKIN. Thank you, Chairman—Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the committee for this opportunity. Thank you also, Congressman Welch, for the very generous introduction and for your steadfast support of small businesses throughout the pandemic.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on the urgent need for robust public investment in care infrastructure, including paid family medical leave.

Thank you, in particular, Chairwoman Maloney, for your strong leadership and commitment to expanding paid leave through the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act.

My name is Eric Sorkin and together with my wife, Laura, we own and operate Runamok Maple, a maple syrup manufacturing business with 75 employees in Fairfax, Vermont. I am also speaking today as a member of Main Street Alliance, a national network of more than 30,000 small business owners.

The importance of paid family medical leave became crystal clear to me during our first few years in business. At the time, we had just about 10 employees.

I had learned that the wife of one of our employees was losing a battle to terminal cancer. This happened in the middle of the sugaring season, when the hours are long and unpredictable. Our employee had been coming into work in the middle of this terrible family ordeal because he wasn't in a position to miss a paycheck or risk losing his job. Put succinctly, he believed he couldn't afford to spend time with her, even though he desperately needed to.

In that moment, without even realizing it, we launched our companies paid family and medical leave policy. We told our employee to take the time he needed to care for his wife, and we continued to pay him while he was out.

Even with our small team, it wasn't a remotely hard decision. Nobody, least of all the—least of all those in the most precarious financial positions, should have to choose between getting paid or taking care of loved ones or their health.

Likewise, why do we embrace a system where small business owners feel as though they must choose between their own profitability and the well being of their employees? It is a recipe for poor choices and bad outcomes on both sides.

Since then, numerous members of our team have been out for extended illnesses, to care for loved ones, and for maternity leave. Just in the past few months, one of our longtime employees contracted viral meningitis, and was out for weeks as he battled a persistent fever and delirium. Another employee was sexually assaulted and has struggled with her mental health since.

The last thing either of them needs is the added worry are we are getting paid. Things happen and none of us can predict when. As business owners, we do everything we can to support our employees and hope that they want to do the same for us.

While I personally believe that the return on paid leave is many times the expense, paying for family medical leave is costly. The financial burden on our own business has been significant, particularly during the early years before we were profitable.

Several times, including as recently as a year ago, we have looked into short-term disability insurance. We hoped this might be a solution, but, unfortunately, we found the policies available to companies of our size both inadequate and unaffordable.

That is why I, along with many other Vermont small business owners, have been active in a state campaign to win paid family medical leave. The idea is straightforward. You know, we set aside a few dollars each week per employee into a fund. Then when an employee goes out on leave the fund then pays that employee's salary. In return, as an employer, I have their salary to hire a replacement worker or cover overtime.

A solution such as this would be a huge improvement over the current system, where we face unpredictable and sharp cost hikes when someone goes out on leave. A majority of small business owners across the political spectrum support a public solution, and that support remains high after paid leave programs have been implemented in those states.

If we didn't know it before, COVID brought the point home. As a business, prioritizing employee safety goes hand in hand with protecting our business and the health of our community.

Speaking for my business, the challenges were quite significant, and about 80 percent of our frontline workers needed time off during COVID, either to quarantine or to recover.

As a small company, absorbing all those costs in such a short period of time would have been a tremendous challenge. The passage of the federally enacted Families First Coronavirus Response Act was extremely helpful to our company as we navigated COVID.

The legislation made what could have been tough decisions easy, and was critical to our business during this time. Doing the right thing as a small business owner should always be this easy.

Asking us to cover these expenses out of pocket is really asking for quite a lot and the alternative, asking for workers to go without coverage, is simply no solution at all.

America is a nation made up of small businesses and those who work for them. By creating a national paid leave solution, we are creating a more level playing field for workers and all of our small business owners.

As Congress considers a long-term economic infrastructure and recovery package, a national permanent paid leave policy and program must be a priority. Paid leave is not just what small business employees deserve. It is vital to keeping our entire community safe and our economy resilient.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentleman yields back. Ms. Manning, you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF HADLEY HEATH MANNING, DIRECTOR OF
POLICY, INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM**

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. My name is Hadley Heath Manning, and I am director of policy for Independent Women's Forum, and I am a Senior Blankley Fellow at the Steamboat Institute.

I am also the mother of three young children, and I have taken three paid maternity leaves in the last five years. So I, certainly, personally appreciate the importance of this issue.

In my role at IWF, I also manage a group of female employees. We frequently have staffers out on maternity leave, so I understand how this issue impacts employers as well.

Expanding access to paid family medical leave is a noble goal, a goal that I support. But the real question is how. Lawmakers should keep in mind that the government is, in some ways, a unique employer and should not serve as a model for all private sector employers who are diverse in size, industry, labor force, and resources.

The government can increase taxes or use deficit spending to fund new benefits for employees. Private sector employers cannot.

Many American businesses suffered or shuttered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and are still—still struggling to recover, if they will at all. Those businesses are not contemplating a vast expansion of benefits for their employees because they simply lack the resources.

It would do those private businesses more harm than good at this moment to require that in order to open their doors or create new jobs they must offer a generous comprehensive paid leave benefit to follow the model set by this proposed legislation.

The trend toward better access to paid leave in the United States actually tracks closely with economic trends. At the height of the pre-pandemic economy, more and more U.S. employers were offering paid leave as a way to attract and retain workers in a tight labor market.

One question for lawmakers to consider today is whether the Federal Government now as an employer needs to enhance the compensation and benefits it offers in order to compete for labor.

If the answer is no, then to offer greater benefits than necessary is simply poor stewardship of taxpayer dollars. In reality, the Federal work force already has access to more benefits than private sector workers and, on average, Federal employees are compensated better.

The average salary among Federal workers is \$85,000. This is significantly greater than the median total household income for the general U.S. population. Over 50 percent of employees have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 36 percent in the general population.

This means that the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act would be taxing a relatively less resourced general population to provide special and, perhaps, unnecessary benefits for Federal workers, an already relatively privileged group.

Similarly, other proposed legislation, like the Family Act, would create a national paid leave entitlement and would also exacerbate income inequality.

Government paid family medical leave programs have been shown to distribute money from low-income workers to those with higher incomes.

Studies from California, New Jersey, Canada, Sweden, Iceland, Belgium, and Norway have demonstrated this, and the scholars concluded in Norway these programs constitute a, quote, "pure leisure transfer to middle-income families at the expense of some of the least well off in society," end quote.

This is regressive, not progressive. Given that the problem of a lack of paid family medical leave is most pronounced among low-income people, lawmakers should not establish a program or policy that disadvantages this group further.

Another potential downside of comprehensive paid leave benefits for the Federal work force and beyond is that this benefit may actually create an incentive for discrimination against certain groups, including women, elderly workers, and workers with significant medical issues because these groups are more likely to take advantage of those leave benefits and employers know this.

Pew Research has, in fact, documented the strong positive correlation between more generous paid family medical leave and wider gender pay gaps in 16 OECD countries.

Finally, we must consider costs. Sadly, so far, there has been no cost estimate for the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act.

But in addition to the hard cost to taxpayers, the Federal Government will face other costs when workers are not present at their jobs, while they are using the new benefits that are offered in this proposed legislation.

While we all want workers with family and medical emergencies to have the option to take time away from work, the flip side for employers is increased absenteeism and turnover.

Employers and fellow employees alike will take on the burden of covering for workers who are out on leave or, in the case of the Federal Government, the institution that we all rely on to do the people's work may become slower, less efficient, and less responsive to the citizens that it serves.

The government is unlike other employers in many ways, which is why it should not be the model for comprehensive paid family leave.

Rather than instituting a one-size universal—a one-size-fits-all universal policy, lawmakers should focus any government intervention on helping those who need support most, while otherwise allowing businesses and employees to continue to find their own personalized solutions that work best for them.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back. Ms. Bigelow, you are now recognized for your testimony.

STATEMENT OF LELAINE BIGELOW, INTERIM VICE PRESIDENT FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND CONGRESSIONAL RELATIONS, NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR WOMEN & FAMILIES

Ms. BIGELOW. Good morning, Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and members of the committee. My name is Lelaïne Bigelow, and I am the interim vice president for economic justice and congressional relations at the National Partnership for Women and Families.

I am pleased to join you to discuss the importance of paid leave for Federal employees, including congressional employees, and this issue is deeply personal for me, having spent more than a decade working in the administration and in Congress.

Growing up from modest means, I came to understand the importance of access to paid leave when I was just 16, working at a family restaurant in Pensacola, Florida. I was surrounded by hard-working moms who were servers, and there was one in particular, Toni, who left a mark on me.

When we didn't have a lot of diners, Toni would tell her story about how she went into labor at the restaurant, then went across the street to the hospital, delivered her baby, and was back the next day for the Sunday morning rush. People would nod their heads in admiration, but even then, I knew Toni was faced with an impossible choice—losing her job and her paycheck or caring for herself and her family.

So, in January 2013, when my husband and I discovered I was pregnant, we felt excited and scared. I was working at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and he was employed by the House of Representatives.

I recalled Toni's story and knew that I wanted to take the full 12 weeks of time off allowed under the FMLA to bond, recover, and acclimate to parenthood.

At the time, the Federal Government did not have a paid leave policy. You had to take time off without pay or use your accrued leave if you had enough available. Complicating matters, in May we found out that I had an incompetent cervix, and I was immediately put on bed rest for the next four months.

Thankfully, I was given a pregnancy accommodation that allowed me to work from home while on bed rest. At the time, this was unusual, and because it felt like a privilege, I worked extra hard throughout my difficult pregnancy to avoid the appearance that I was taking advantage of the situation.

But the diagnosis meant I needed to go to the doctor every week and a specialist every few weeks, requiring more time off of work. Taking an hour or two each week for doctor's appointments chipped away at the time that I was trying to save.

Plus, I was sent to the hospital twice, which eroded my time off even more. It was stressful and I was desperate to make up time even in the hospital.

I answered emails and made phone calls because every moment I spent caring for myself and my pregnancy meant losing money and time later.

Like so many women of color, I faced the challenge of navigating pregnancy health complications without the paid leave I needed to care for myself and my family.

Despite our best efforts, in July, my son, Jack, was born six weeks prematurely and was immediately brought to the NICU, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. That same day, the Transportation HUD appropriations bill was on the Senate floor, a bill I had been following for my team at HUD prior to the birth.

I kept responding to emails that morning because I didn't know how long Jack would be in the NICU and I knew this was one more day with a paycheck.

In the end, Jack Lincoln Bigelow was in the NICU for 10 days and was on a breathing monitor for six weeks after discharge, and nearly eight years later, I can see he is very healthy and has more energy than either of his parents combined.

And now, thanks to the tireless efforts of Chairwoman Maloney and Chairman Smith, and the other congressional champions and advocates around this table, the Federal Government began providing 12 weeks of paid parental leave for Federal employees last October.

During the effort to expand access to paid leave for Federal employees, I often reflected on my own experience and how the emotional, physical, and financial stress of my situation could have significantly been different if I had paid leave.

I wonder if I could have carried Jack to full term. So, it is clear to me the work mustn't stop here. The United States needs a paid family and medical leave program like the one outlined in Chairman Neal's Building an Economy for Families Act and Chairwoman Maloney's Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act.

A national paid leave policy will provide families financial security and peace of mind at some of the most challenging moments and making the largest impacts on families currently struggling the most.

It will enable more women to remain in the work force, allow parents to invest more time and care in their children, and help older Americans to age with dignity and support from their loved ones.

More than 100 million working people in this country cannot afford to wait any longer.

Thank you so much.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. I thank all of the witnesses and I now recognize myself for five minutes for questions.

Democrats have been fighting for years for comprehensive paid family and medical leave. When I was first elected in 1993, the very first bill that I voted on was the Family and Medical Leave Act.

In my career—my long career, I have gotten more compliments on that bill than any other. It meant that women and men would not be fired if they had a child they had to take leave to take care of them.

But right after it many of us started work on trying to expand it to paid leave. I remember going to meetings with then Senator Joe Biden where we started working—and Rosa DeLauro and others, working on expanding paid leave, and I am very proud of the work that this committee, that COR, did in leading the successful passage of paid parental leave for Federal employees in 2019.

[Technical issue.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK. We have lost the live stream.

We are going to pause for a moment. We have lost the live stream.

[Pause.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. The committee will come to order. I apologize. This was a—throughout the entire system in Congress. We are now reconvening.

Thank you, and I now recognize myself for five minutes and for questions.

Democrats have been fighting for years for comprehensive paid family and medical leave. I was proud to vote for the Family and Medical Leave Act in 1994, which granted 12 weeks of unpaid leave so that people wouldn't be fired for having a child.

Shortly afterwards, with then Senator Joe Biden, Rosa DeLauro, and others, we started working for paid leave. I am very proud of the work that the COR committee did in the successful passage of paid parental leave for Federal employees in 2019.

But over the last year, we have seen that countless families continue to suffer because our Nation still has no nationwide paid family and medical leave policy.

President Biden and Vice President Harris have put forward the American Families Plan, which includes an historic investment in universal paid leave for every American family.

Ms. Shabo, why is a nationwide paid leave policy important to the pandemic recovery? How will it help American families for the future?

Ms. SHABO. Thank you so much for the question, Chairwoman Maloney.

You know, we saw throughout the pandemic the enormous numbers of people who left the work force because of caregiving responsibilities and for health needs.

Some of that had to do with children who were unexpectedly out of school or care. Some of it had to do with caring for older adults or loved ones who needed care. Some of it had to do with the personal health consequences of COVID-19 itself.

We needed paid leave long before the pandemic. We urgently need paid leave coming out of the pandemic. But the pandemic brought into sharp relief, in particular, the connection between the gendered nature of caregiving and work force participation.

You know, we have nearly 2 million women who are still out of the work force, many of them because of caregiving. This is an unsustainable phenomenon.

It will take women more than a year to get back to work force participation levels of the—before the pandemic, and this is one intervention that will help that, but more than that, help create a stronger and more inclusive work force for women, for people of color, for people with disabilities, for families that are multi-generational for a long time to come.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

Mr. Kelley, would you agree that a permanent expansion of paid leave to all Federal employees beyond parental leave will help strengthen the Federal work force?

Unmute, please.

Mr. KELLEY. Thank you, Chairwoman Maloney.

I, certainly, agree with that because, you know, and I have said this before. You know, one of the major problems I think that the Federal Government has is that they don't offer a good benefits package in order to keep and retain, you know, Federal employees.

So, they will go other places because, you know, other players will offer these benefits. So, it is so important that we do that.

Chairwoman MALONEY. OK. My bill, the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act builds on paid parental leave for Federal employees that was implemented last October.

The bill will ensure that Federal employees have access to paid leave in the event of a personal or family emergency or military deployment of a family member.

Ms. Bigelow, can you explain why all workers and families need this kind of comprehensive paid leave?

Ms. Bigelow? Ms. Bigelow?

[No response.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. Well, she is having difficulty.

As we have also heard, a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program is good for business. Mr. Sorkin, you discussed the reasons why you made the decision to offer paid family medical leave to your employees.

How would a comprehensive national paid leave program help small businesses like yours?

Mr. SORKIN. Thank you, Chairwoman. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Well, currently, the burden falls directly on business owners and employers to come up with a makeshift solution. Either way, that ends up being costly, uncertain, and uneven.

A national paid leave program would offer predictability and peace of mind, and it would also level the playing field between big and small businesses.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

And just in closing, the Biden/Harris administration and Democrats in Congress will continue to work to enact paid family and medical leave for all employees in the Federal Government and the private sector.

I urge my Republican colleagues to work with us to make paid family and medical leave a reality for American families.

And I now yield to the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Norman.

Mr. Norman, you are now recognized.

Mr. NORMAN. Thank you, Chairman Maloney.

You know, I am really shocked at this—at even having this hearing. This is—I think Clay Higgins said a three-ring circus. This is a—this is an insult to the American taxpayer.

Here's the words I have heard from some of our witnesses: love, caring, caregiving. Mrs. Maloney, I think you mentioned or one of the witnesses mentioned strengthening the Federal work force.

You know, I don't have to tell anybody listening to this hearing, you know, our cities are burning. Our police forces are being decimated because they are being defunded by this administration.

Crime is—our shootings are up. Illegals are coming across the border. One of the witnesses mentioned protecting our borders. We have got cartels that are being—making half a billion dollars a month.

We have got the administration that won't even go down there. Our businesses had been shut down for a year and a half. Workers—we can't get workers. When you go to the McDonald's that I did and got put on a limit to buy because \$13—because they had two people in the store. They couldn't get people to come back. Lumber prices are up 400 percent.

And we are having a hearing on paying people, Federal workers, four months to work. This is an insult to the taxpayer. It really is.

Who is going to pay for this? We don't even have a CBO score. We didn't even have the courage to have a CBO score.

Thirty trillion in debt. Where is the caring for our small businesses that are the lifeblood? I don't need to tell anybody the Federal Government needs to be cut.

The Federal—people want to get the Federal Government out of our lives, not in more of our lives. And what this administration is doing, particularly with the 2 million illegals coming into the country, is expanding the Federal Government. Why don't you just let them, you know—what is four months? Go and put six months off.

I can tell you one thing. Small businesses don't get six months off. I can tell you one thing, that the small businesses that support the Federal Government, this is a backbreaker along with the taxes that are—that this administration is proposing. It is not your

money. It is not—the politicians got it wrong. It is not y'all's money. It is the people's money.

And I am sick and tired of this charade that we are having. Miss Maloney, I like you as a person. We have asked you time and time again to have hearings on inflation. What are we going to do to solve problems?

Let us have a hearing on the—let us pay the police maybe for a change instead of the criminals. And here we are, wasting time, not even letting us come to the—not let us come to the hearing room when we had a guy in a wheelchair that showed up.

This is a—this is a, really an insult to everybody, particularly the taxpayers. The taxpayers deserve better than this. And where are the priorities? With this country and the shape we are in, where are the priorities?

And we are having a hearing on paying people more money to stay out of work. The states form the Federal Government, not vice versa. They work for us, not vice versa.

So, you know, I really don't have any questions for the rehearsed responses from our witnesses. I guess thank you for coming. But, you know, it is a—this is a complete waste of time.

But thank you anyway, and I guess we will—we will carry on with the hearing.

I yield the balance.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlewoman from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton, is recognized.

Mrs. Norton?

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is an important hearing for a number of reasons. I particularly appreciate that you are having this early hearing now because this bill has been in effect for nine months. So, this is the time to look to see if it has made any difference.

And it makes a difference that the Federal Government was first. We ought to lead the way for the private sector. In fact, it looks like they are leading the way, in many ways. But for the Federal Government to lead the way to show that it works or doesn't work is exactly what we needed, and this hearing enables us to see, well, does it work or not?

That is why my first question is for Mr. Kelley. Now, we are nine months in, Mr. Kelley, to this bill, just the time to kind of look back almost a year since it was passed to see how it has affected Federal employees.

I know it is early, but it would help to know—you have already said that it affected employee morale. But can you tell us, has it affected, for example, retention?

Do we know this early whether it affects retention at a time we know that people are looking for workers and we wouldn't want to lose experienced Federal workers? Do we have any information on that at this time?

Mr. KELLEY. Thank you, Representative Norton. I can't say that we have any concrete documentation as far as retention. But what I will tell you is that we have had so many employees to utilize these opportunities, you know, until it is insurmountable.

We can't tell you how much people have appreciated having this, and I think that it will have a positive impact on retention because

employees are grateful for the bill that was passed to give them the opportunity to use this leave, you know, which is vastly different and equally important to the one that has been proposed now. OK, so I hope that answered your question, ma'am.

Ms. NORTON. Well, I can understand it is early to know. I hope that your union will keep—will find a way to see what the effect is. It is also the Federal Government should do that.

And I know that, importantly, this bill affects adoption and foster—fostering a child as well, something that is very important to parenting at this time.

Ms. Shabo, why is paid parental leave not enough to support workers and their families?

Ms. SHABO. Thank you so much for the question, Representative Norton.

So, parental leave is used—when we look at the unpaid leave under the FMLA, parental leave is about one quarter of the time people that take FMLA leave. About a fifth are for caring for an older loved one or a person with disability, a family member, and about half is for a worker's own serious health issue.

So, most FMLA leaves are to care for yourself or to care for a loved one. This will only be exacerbated as the population shifts. We have an older population now. We have fewer people who are available—fewer family members available to care for older loved ones because of the mismatch in population sizes.

So, care for yourself, care for a loved one. Very, very critical and will become more so over time.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much. That is important to know.

Madam Chair, this has been an important hearing and you have conducted it, I think, appropriately at a time when we can begin to measure it—measure its effect. It is the first step, and I thank you very much for this hearing allowing us to monitor where we are now.

I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, you are now recognized.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairwoman. Thank you for holding this hearing and giving us an opportunity to speak into these issues.

I would like to echo the ranking member's sentiments on the importance of having or at least these hearings being available in person. If nothing else, the tech challenges we have experienced today, I think, echo just how important that is.

I would like to talk, really, about what is going on in this committee, first of all, and that is we are supposed to be the Oversight Committee. That means our essential job is to ensure that the taxpayers' dollars are being used effectively. We are to wait, you know, make sure we weed out waste, fraud, and abuse.

Currently, we have a border crisis going on with hundreds of millions of dollars going out, often in no-bid contracts. That is worth looking into. We have economic and an inflation crisis that is worth looking into.

We have unemployment benefits fraud. It has been estimated—some reports say that nearly half of the unemployment benefits doled out by the government have been stolen by criminals.

It is estimated that amount of fraud could be as high as \$400 billion, which would be the largest—my understanding is, the largest case of fraud in our Nation's history.

We have the China COVID origins that we should be looking into. We have cyber attacks. These are real existential threats to our Nation and, certainly, the preeminence we have enjoyed on the world stage.

And so we need to be able to address these things. I would encourage the committee to be able to take these up. This is extremely important for us to fulfill our essential duty.

I appreciated the chairwoman's passion about the private sector and Federal civilian work force. If only the data backed it up that would be something.

But a Federal—data from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis in 2018 said the Federal civilian work force had an average wage of over \$94,000, where the average for the private sector was about \$63,000.

And so, the notion that the Federal work force right now is lagging behind the private work force that is funding the Federal work force just doesn't stand up to the available data.

And I would just say that right now is really the wrong time, as we are working to recover from the economy. Right now, our offices deal daily with casework and one of the big issues that we are dealing with right now is FSA offices. Farmers are having trouble getting their claims processed—their applications processed.

Veterans—we are dealing with the VA benefits processing that is woefully behind. The passport expedited process is now weeks long. The IRS is hopelessly backlogged.

And so all this at a time where we have some very good Federal workers who are continuing to work and do their due diligence, but a number of them, in the words of our constituents, are tele-not-working, and it has been very difficult to keep up with the pace of supporting and serving the people who have elected us to serve them.

But I want to touch on what is really kind of the heart of this issue, is that politicians sometimes get away with this idea that we can measure our personal compassion by how much of other people's money we give away, and that is really a flawed sentiment.

Because, truly, everyone on this issue wants families to prosper. We want families to be taken care of. We want moms to be taken care of. We want adoptive parents to be taken care of, all these kinds of things.

The question is, is how do we create a sustainable model that meets the needs, but doesn't steal opportunity from the next generation, and so we have a couple different models.

The Democratic model has been to put a heavy burden on the American taxpayer, often with deficit spending, as we are \$30 trillion in debt, stealing from the next generations' opportunities to have these same sort of benefits, which is, I think, questionably moral.

So, we need to meet the needs and obligations of this generation with this generation's resources. And so, one model that does work and what we were seeing working, is the organic approach and that is for us to have a thriving economy where just a year and

a half ago we saw wages increasing and because of that we had a competitive work force.

And employers were—had the economic wherewithal because we had a booming economy to create a competitive work force to begin to offer these sort of services in a sustainable model. That is a sustainable model that provides increased benefits over time without burdening the next generation.

So, the important thing is that we realize that the heart of what we are trying to accomplish is great, but there is a way to go about it.

Too often, we see the government coming in and creating problems before stepping in to try to solve them. We see that with the latest crime spree. We see that with the economic issues that are happening right now.

So, let us have a better approach to these issues and let the American people do the great work that they are so awesome at doing.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, is now recognized.

Mr. Connolly?

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and thank you for holding this hearing. The Federal work force is aging. Think about this. Twenty percent of the private sector work force is under the age of 30. Only seven percent of the Federal work force is under 30.

As of April of this year, 300,000 Federal employees are eligible to retire. That is 13.5 percent of the entire Federal work force. And within five years, that number will go from 13.5 percent to 30 percent, almost 600,000 Federal employees.

Ms. Shabo, am I pronouncing that right? Shabo?

Ms. SHABO. Yes. Yes, you are.

Mr. CONNOLLY. You testified that comprehensive paid family and medical leave for Federal employees will help attract and retain the work force of the future, both diverse and more inclusive and younger.

Do you want to elaborate a little bit on that? Because we talk about it like it is a nice thing to do and I don't know and—but actually, from a practical point of view, how are we going to attract younger workers who will come to expect these kinds of provisions in the private sector, as the chairwoman pointed out earlier in this hearing, when we are not doing it in the public sector?

Ms. SHABO. Yes, thank you for the question, and I think the answer has two parts.

One, you know, with all respect to the chairwoman, I do want to just reiterate that the private sector is not doing great for most workers. It is doing OK for high-wage workers and some of the same workers that would be equivalent to the Federal work force in terms of more educated, higher skilled, higher paid.

It is not doing great for middle income and lower wage workers. Again, just five percent of low-wage workers have access to paid family leave and that has only increased by two percentage points in the last 10 years.

So, those private sector workers are not doing great. However, old workers, many workers, 53 million workers are caregivers to older adults or to children with special needs. Eleven million workers are caring for both a child and an adult who has a disability or an illness or an injury.

More than half of those are Millennials. Another 25 percent or so are Gen X. Six percent are Gen Z. So, as we think about building the kinds of workplaces that meet the needs of younger workers, who, by the way, also expect these care responsibilities to continue for at least five years, maybe longer, we have to put in place workplace policies both in the public sector for sure, as the Federal Government as an employer, but also in the private sector for workers overall.

This is why we need both, you know, paid leave benefits in the Federal work force that helps you attract workers, but it is also why we need a paid leave baseline for everybody. This is an economic competitiveness issue for the country as well as a diversity and inclusion issue.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. Kelley, from your vantage point, what about that? I mean, how are we going to recruit and retain the work force of the future, from your point of view, if we are not addressing issues such as the one that is the subject of this hearing today?

Mr. KELLEY. You know, I really appreciate that question because we have to address these issues, right, because unless we forget that—you know, COVID-19 taught us a lot.

It taught us that, you know, now is the time for us to address family issues because what we saw was, we saw so many families struggling to take care of their families during the COVID-19 issues. And it is more and more prevalent, and we are going to see more and more of it.

I am going to give you just an example, not necessarily dealing with COVID, but I just know of a member of our organization, right. A single mother, you know, in the state of Alabama, you know, had a son that was kind of hanging out with some of the wrong people, right.

Got himself in some trouble doing some things that he shouldn't have been doing, and the people—boys that he thought was his friends actually got him high on marijuana and hung him.

OK. He ended up being paralyzed, and his mother had to be home to take care of him. His mother almost lost her job as a result of it because she used all of her leave, you know, and therefore, they were proposing to dismiss her because of her abuse of leave.

She wasn't abusing leave. She was trying to take care of her son. He was the—she was the only member—family member that he had to take care of him. And so—but because we were able to save her job is the only reason why she didn't have to go in bankruptcy, she didn't lose her home and all that type of thing. And there are numbers of stories like that that tell us that this is the right time to have this discussion.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back. The gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. Grothman?

Mr. GROTHMAN. There. We will start off with Ms. Manning.

Last week, we passed a bill, which I voted for, but I had some misgivings because we were adding another, you know, paid day off for Federal employees that I don't think is going to be reciprocated in the private sector by the vast majority of employers.

By my account, when one adds together the 12 weeks of paid leave that this benefit would provide, 12 paid holidays, and 20 days of paid vacation, 13 days of paid sick leave, we get up to about four months of paid leave for Federal employees.

Could you compare that to kind of what is going on in the private sector here, Ms. Manning?

Ms. MANNING. Sure. And a lot depends on how benefits are qualified or measured. But the Bureau of Labor Statistics does keep track of how many private sector full time and part time workers have access to different types of paid time off.

And so while it is true that nearly 90 percent of full time workers in the private sector have access to paid vacation time or paid leave of some type, the reality is that when you start to talk specifically about benefits that are quantified or qualified as paid family leave, it is a much lower number.

So, about one in five private sector workers who are full time and only five percent of part time workers have access to paid family leave. And then if you want to get industry specific, which I think is helpful when you start to think about the competitiveness of the Federal Government as an employer, 37 percent of workers in the finance and insurance sector have access to paid family leave, 33 percent in the information industry sector, 27 percent in professional, scientific, and technical services.

And so the point of this is to say not even half of workers in some of the highest-paying fields have access to this type of family and medical leave.

So, I don't know that it is justifiable for the Federal Government to say we need 12 weeks of paid leave for any FMLA-qualified leave reason in order to be competitive. That is simply not where the private sector is.

Of course, if you look at companies—specific companies like Netflix or the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that are really at the tip of the spear leading with the most generous types of paid family medical leave, you could say that the Federal Government isn't keeping up with those employers.

But when you look at the average or you look at the portions of different industries, it is just not the industry standard to offer 12 weeks of paid time off.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Will this have any unintended consequences for the guys who pay the bills, the private sector?

Ms. MANNING. Oh, absolutely, and I think it is—you know, maybe one misperception I would like to dispel, if I may, is that the current leading proposal to establish a comprehensive national paid leave entitlement would be paid for with a new payroll tax, and you can establish a payroll tax on employers, but the CBO rec-

ognizes, as do most economists, that a new tax on employers is simply passed along to employees in the form of lower wages.

And so, we are talking about not just increased taxation costs but lower wages as a result, fewer economic opportunities, fewer new jobs. That is, simply, the reality. When you raise the cost of employment, you get less employment.

And so, I think it is a misperception to say that only businesses or only employers will bear the costs of comprehensive paid leave policies, at least the most popular leading proposals that Democrats have advanced like the Family Act.

There are other proposals that I would be happy to talk about that come with less downside, fewer tradeoffs, better individual choice for workers and lower costs for taxpayers.

But if we are talking about establishing a new national paid leave entitlement, the cost will be borne by workers and disproportionately by low-income workers because that is how regressive payroll taxes work.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Just a general question for any of you. I know we have dealt with the Post Office in this hearing otherwise, always in financial straits. Does anybody have any estimates on what the cost will be to the Postal Service?

[No response.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. Nobody has thought of that?

OK. Next question. Has anybody thought about the effect it will have on the ability of the Post Office as people take off to deliver mail effectively on a timely basis? And we hear we have such a shortage of people doing work of any—of any sort in this country right now.

Anybody thought that through? Anybody on the panel?

[No response.]

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Something else I think we should think about before we move ahead with this bill.

Do you feel that the Federal Government is the best place to test out this big expansion, in your opinion, Ms. Manning?

Ms. MANNING. So, as I indicated in my testimony, I think that, you know, just like any other employer, the Federal Government has to set their policies related to H.R. and compensation and so forth.

But I do not think that the Federal Government is a model for other employers in the Nation. The private sector is different in important ways.

As taxpayers, we have a stake in how Federal Government resources are used. That is a stake that I don't have in some of the ways that other companies choose to operate or choose to compensate their employees.

So, I really feel that the Federal Government is a unique employer and shouldn't be used as sort of the model for other employers.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. Well, thank you for the five-minutes.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman from—thank you. Thank you.

The gentleman from Maryland, Mr. Raskin, is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. RASKIN. Madam Chair, thank you very much for calling this really important hearing. Paid family medical leave is a fixture in advanced countries around the world, and I think a lot of them look at America with some shock and scandal that the wealthiest country on earth does not provide paid family medical leave, both for public sector and private sector employees.

And, obviously, there is a campaign going on against paid family medical leave for workers in either the public and private sector.

And I think another piece of bitter fruit of that campaign is trying to pit public and private workers against each other as if, you know, public school teachers and letter carriers aren't married to people who are small business people and engineers. The public sector and the private sector are intertwined.

And in America, the Federal Government is actually the largest employer with 2.6 million employees. Tens of thousands of them live in my district.

These are hardworking patriotic people who are running—working in every department from the Park Service, Interior Department, to the Department of Defense to the Department of Justice to the people who make it possible for the country to operate because we need government in order to make society work.

And unless there any anarchists out there or Antifa members on the panel, I think everybody has got to agree that we need government. So, I think some of the attacks on government workers are really improper and sound very antiquated and obsolete to me.

But in any event, 85 percent of Federal workers don't live in the D.C. area. They live across the country, and they are doing the work, whether it is for the Department of Agriculture or the Department of Commerce, or Homeland Security, all over America, and we have them in all of our states and all of our districts.

But I want to ask Ms. Shabo—I hope I am pronouncing your last name right. I want to ask you about the public health dimension of this, because we went through this discussion in Maryland when I was a member of the General Assembly, and one of the things that became very clear to us, Democrats and Republicans, Independents alike, is that we don't want people going to work when they are sick.

And you would think that COVID-19 would have taught us that. You know, there is a new report that has just came out about the teams of doctors that President Trump had to take care of him to save him from COVID-19 when he had rushed heedlessly into going out without a mask and telling everybody it would magically disappear and just use hydroxychloroquine and all that nonsense.

But he had teams of government lawyers working on him to try to rescue him from his own folly and recklessness. Most Americans don't have that.

So, if somebody gets sick, don't we want them to stay home? I mean, do we really want to create a financial incentive for them to go to work and spread whatever it is they have?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely not. Thank you for bringing this up, Congressman Raskin, and Maryland has been a leader on paid sick days.

You know, it's—Congress was smart at the beginning of the pandemic to implement the Families Coronavirus Response Act, which though limited in terms of its scope and who it applied to, impacted—impacted the contagion of COVID-19 and is estimated to have prevented 15,000 COVID cases per day nationwide.

So, that alone speaks to the importance of time to stay home and to recover, and to keep yourself and your family and your workplace safe.

But more than that, as we think about the need for paid family leave and paid medical leave, there are now untold numbers of long-haul COVID survivors. About 25 percent of them are expected to have symptoms, chronic, intermittent, other symptoms that continue.

We need both paid sick time and we need paid medical leave for longer-term serious health conditions. Your research shows that when people have access to paid leave they come back to work more quickly.

They are more productive. This is good for them, obviously, for their family, and for their employer in terms of—

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you. Thank you so much, Ms. Shabo.

Mr. Sorkin, let me turn to you. I have two quick questions for you. One is, are you aware of other businesses in your industry that also paid people—paid family and medical leave?

And I think there is some suggestion that American workers in the private sector or public sector will cheat. If they have got paid family medical leave, they will invent sicknesses. They will pretend somebody has got cancer. They will pretend somebody has got leukemia. They will fake it, like we are a nation of con men or con women.

But has that been your experience? Tell us, honestly, are people, like, rigging the system and ripping you off?

Mr. SORKIN. Well, to answer that the first question—thank you, Congressman. But to answer the first question, other small businesses like mine, it is very unusual to find small businesses that are willing to absorb the expense.

In my experience, we have not seen people abusing the system. I think it accounts even—you know, it is less than a percent or two percent of our payroll and consistently less. And, particularly, in a small business, we know our employees and that kind of abuse just doesn't—you know, is much less likely to happen.

Thank you.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

I now recognize the gentleman from Louisiana. Mr. Higgins is now recognized.

Mr. Higgins?

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very sorry. Now, I hope America is paying attention. I am very sorry that we have hurt our colleagues' feelings by actually showing up in person for Oversight Committee service.

America faces an unprecedented labor shortage, massive challenges that cause our economic recovery to struggle because of the majority's decision to spend trillions of dollars in deficit spending, paying people to stay home.

Every business owner from sea to shining sea that I have had a conversation with either in person or on the telephone, in digital town halls, through social media, through direct contact and interaction, meeting with large business organizations that represent the needs and interests of our Nation's economic recovery, on behalf of employers, the story is the same.

We have an incredible challenge facing America today because our work force is staying home. Why are they staying home? Because the Democrat majority has spent trillions of American dollars that we don't have to pay them to stay home. And the Democrats' answer to that is to hold our virtual committee hearings suggesting that we should pay more people to stay home.

It is insulting. It is abhorrent. Our nation is struggling to recover from the CCP virus. Working Americans are fighting to survive. Employers cannot find employees. We face \$31 trillion in debt.

It is wrong on many levels for Congress to suggest that Federal employees need more time off.

I had—I had thought to submit for the—for the record the list of benefits for Federal employees right now and paid leave right now that Federal employees enjoy. Most American employees do not—do not have anything close to that level of benefit and paid leave.

But I decided not to because I challenge America. America, I am talking to you now. Please do some research and look at what your Federal counterparts in your industry or your background, your profession, your area of expertise, compare that to what you have got and what your family faces. I ask America to do its own research.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the panelists for being here today. I think this was a—this is not the kind of hearing Oversight should be conducting and what we do investigate as an Oversight Committee should be done in person.

That is my opinion, and I yield.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

The gentlewoman from Michigan, Ms. Tlaib, is recognized.

Ms. Tlaib?

Ms. TLAIB. Thank you, Chairwoman. Thank you all so much for this incredibly important hearing, and I think for my district, which is the third poorest congressional district in the country, this hearing, you know, for my residents is important, as we really do our due diligence to oversee—have oversight of what our policies are and what the impact is.

And you all know, if anything, COVID has just exposed—this pandemic has just exposed how these systems are set up in a way that doesn't really allow our residents and people to thrive, which does impact our small businesses.

And so I just—as a person that is a mother of two, and I still remember, Chairwoman, working at a nonprofit organization because that is what I—I wanted to change the world.

I went to law school to do that and that is what I wanted to do, even though I was in a lot of, you know, high debt. Still am, and for me, I brought my child to work. He was in the playpen, like, behind my desk, and I nursed him there at my desk. I did my conference calls.

But I was exhausted. Even thinking about it, I remember breaking down several times just in tears because I was tired. I didn't get enough sleep, and it is just—it is exhausting. We should not have to, you know, live this way in one of the most wealthiest countries in the world.

And so for me, I know many folks, and the panelists may or may not know this, and I want to ask you all, you know, the majority of my colleagues in Congress—and no offense to those that are doing well—the majority of them are millionaires.

They are completely disconnected to what this hearing is about. They really truly are. They are living—you know, some are going to stay rooted and connected to the pain and these broken systems that are on the ground.

But, again, because it is not touching their lives, they are not going to lead with that compassion that I think is needed in Congress.

And so, you know, my question, you know, very much, you know, and I don't know if Ms. Manning or Ms. Shabo or, you know—Eric, thank you for testifying today—you know, and again, you know, I think Ms. Bigelow, you can also answer this, for my district I want to hear from you all.

The trauma, really, that we are creating—and talk a little bit about this—to our children in that—because I know and I see it, where we are allowing our children to not get the care that they need or for us to get the emotional and health care that we need to be able to provide for them and be fully there and present in raising our children.

And so can you all talk a little bit about that? And talk about even, you know, again, COVID. If anything, the pandemic just exposed exactly what my residents have been telling me for years, y'all. Like, it is not working, Rashida. It is not sustainable. I can't do it. I can't get the hours. I can't—it is just not sustainable. I am sick going to work and all of those things.

So, I can start with you, Ms. Shabo, and then maybe go to Eric, and then, of course, Ms. Manning and Ms. Bigelow.

Ms. SHABO. Yes, thank you for the question. So, you know, one of the wonderful things we have learned about the impacts of paid leave is about the impact on infant and maternal health.

Lower rates of maternal depression, higher rates of breastfeeding, higher rates of children's getting immunized on time, lower rates of head trauma and better educational outcomes.

And, you know, to your point about Congress being disconnected, 85 percent of Americans—84 percent of Americans overwhelmingly want Congress to enact a national paid family and medical leave program.

These are taxpayers. They are willing to pay for this program. They are willing to have corporations pay for this program. They are willing to have the wealthy pay for this program.

Whatever the financing source, including themselves, they want this done. So, thank you so much for your question.

Mr. SORKIN. Thank you, Congresswoman. I appreciate the opportunity to chime in as well.

You know, looking back at COVID, it was—it was really clear to us as a business that the first—the first line of defense for em-

ployee safety, for all our safety, was to make sure folks who were sick or potentially exposed wouldn't come into work.

But the plain truth of it is, just asking employees to stay home without offering them pay is just preposterous. You can't expect our lower-wage employees to make that choice.

So, you know, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act is really, really essential for us and a program like that, I think, is just plain as day that we need that if we want to have safe communities and safe workplaces.

Ms. MANNING. I can just chime in briefly that in my last pregnancy during the pandemic and having an infant child during a pandemic, it was very hard, and part of the reason it was so challenging is because of the social isolation and the lack of community supports that are usually there.

And I am hopeful that we can get back to a place as a country where I will have, you know, more freedom and more comfort and interacting with grandparents and the rest of the church community and so forth. I think that stuff is so important.

And I think that paid leave policy is also very important and that is why I just want to be sure that the solutions that we are considering and pursuing are the ones that come with the least downside.

You know, just like it's true that public and private sector workers are married to each other, we are in this together, we are part of the American community, so are taxpayers and families.

Families are taxpayers. It is not as if those are two separate groups of people, and so we have to be considerate of our needs as working moms and working dads and families, but also the bottom line when it comes to, you know, our incomes and how much resources we have and how much taxes we pay.

Ms. TLAIB. Of course. Yes, there is always going to be challenges.

And Ms. Bigelow, if I may, Chairwoman, she can do the final answer, please.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Actually, your time has expired so Ms. Bigelow will have to submit it to the record for us.

Ms. TLAIB. Oh, OK.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman from—the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Keller, is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. Keller?

Mr. KELLER. Thank you, Madam Chair. The logic of not having this hearing take place in person, the fact that we are having it 100 percent virtually is baffling.

The COVID-19 requirements have been lifted across the Nation, including in Washington, DC. All anyone has to do that is watching this proceeding is turn on C-SPAN later on when we are all on the House floor, including the Speaker, Democratic leadership, Republican leadership, all of us, gathered together exactly like we should be doing in this committee. Not conducting 100 percent in person committee meetings is a barrier to effectively serving the people we work for, the people we represent.

The people that I represent, the people that all of us represent across America go to work every day and get the job done. Our job here in Congress to represent them should be no different as we tackle the challenges that face our Nation.

So, getting into why we are here, Ms. Manning, what are some of the examples of the reasons why Federal employees use FMLA?

Ms. MANNING. I imagine that Federal employees use FMLA for the same reason that private sector workers might use FMLA—for the birth or adoption of a child, for a medical emergency, for caregiving, and so forth.

Mr. KELLER. Yes. A personal illness or an illness of somebody in the family or birth of a child, whether those illnesses would be emotional or whether they would be physical?

Ms. MANNING. I believe they have to get approval from a healthcare professional to merit their FMLA absence.

Mr. KELLER. Yes. During 2020, Congress directed dollars toward programs to assist Federal employees who had to stay home due to COVID-19.

Ms. Manning, do we have all the performance data to determine how beneficial this policy was?

Ms. MANNING. I don't know if someone else has that data. I do not have it.

Mr. KELLER. The proposal we are discussing today would allow the Federal employees to take 12 weeks of paid leave for any reason under FMLA. Is there any estimate, Ms. Manning, that you would have seen that would have cost the taxpayers?

Ms. MANNING. No.

Mr. KELLER. OK. And taking a look at what we are doing, all Americans, including those in Federal Government, those who work for state and municipal authorities and those working for private sector businesses of all sizes, deserve to be able to take the time they need to either attend to their own health or assist a loved one.

These benefits should be flexible and workable for both employers and employees. We need to be helping employers grow their business so they can provide the benefits to their employees.

The majority's proposal under discussion today is Federal employees up to four months off when you include all the time that they would have for holidays and so on and any additional time. That is one-third of the year.

And the thing I want to take a look at as a former small business operator, these standards are flat out—they are not workable. Having hardworking taxpayers foot the bill for this, you know, is just not responsible good policy.

And I want to give you an example of when I was—when my son was in the hospital on life support. The employer I worked for, I had a check every week for that time we were at his bedside for that—for that month, because they could afford to do it, because that is what our employers do.

As I mentioned in a hearing with Secretary Walsh, I asked him if he believed that the businesses in America, the small businesses that are owned by our families, friends, neighbors, our constituents, cared about the health and welfare of their employees, and after the second time, I got him to admit he did.

And I believe that of the people that I represent that own businesses and go to work every day in PA-12, and I don't think they need the government telling them what the right thing to do is.

If the business can afford to do it and somebody in their team needs help, they will do it. If there is a member of the team in my office that had an issue, I would certainly afford them the time to deal with that issue, and having a law telling us what is behavior, what we should be doing as human beings, it is just big government not having the trust in the American people.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. KELLER. Not having the trust in the American people to do the right things, and that is where I am different and a lot of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle are different. We have that faith in the American people. We have that faith in individuals—

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. KELLER [continuing]. That we don't need our government to try and legislate morality.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlewoman from the great state of New York, Ms. Ocasio-Cortez, is now recognized.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Chairwoman Maloney, and, you know, we just heard some examples about what may or may not happen with paid leave.

I would like to provide, just very quickly before I start my example, when we first started and opened our office, I decided to offer—and not even offering, we decided that as a matter of policy that we are going to provide three months of parental leave, both for all parents—birthing, nonbirthing, adoptive, et cetera, and that includes fathers as well. And what we have found has been that it has been a profoundly successful policy.

But I think also, to just counter a point that was immediately made, is that having time with our families should not be a matter of charity or profitability.

The fact of the matter is, is that deciding on having paid leave and the decision and the ability to have paid leave is not about how good or charitable your employer is.

It is not about whether they are a good person and it certainly shouldn't be about whether it is profitable for a business. It should be about the importance of value of family and human beings, and these are rights for us.

And parents, mothers, fathers, the human development of children, should not be decided by how profitable that leave is for a business. It should be a right that is afforded to all parents and all people and all human beings.

And moving on, you know, I think I want to narrow in on dads. Let us talk about fathers and the right of fathers to have parental leave and all nonbirthing parents as well.

You know, being a parent, a mom, a dad, et cetera, looks different for every family, and we don't have to subscribe to this binary of a parent that had physically birthed child needs or deserves more leave or time than a nonbirthing parent.

The fact is, is that we need to have leave for all parents because both—even if you have a birthing parent, you cannot do that alone. I mean, I want to dig into that a little bit.

Ms. Bigelow, you and your colleagues at the National Partnership for Women and Families recently published your findings on the need of fathers for having paid family and medical leave.

You stated some of these facts earlier and I apologize for the redundancy, but I think it is really critical for some of my colleagues to hear this again.

So, Ms. Bigelow, you said that just five percent of fathers in professional jobs took more than two weeks off after their most recent child was born, correct?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And we know that low-income dads have it even worse because of the lack of paid leave. So, one study of disadvantaged families showed that nearly 60 percent of dads reported taking zero weeks of paid time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child. Does that sound about right to you?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes.

And we know that the first year after a child's birth or adoption is critical to their development or adjustment inside a new home.

So, fathers are more likely to remain involved in parenting and to equitably divide household chores with their partners if they take time off after their child is born, right.

Ms. BIGELOW. That is right.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And it is true that new moms and new birthing parents have fewer postpartum health complications and improved mental health when new dads also take parental leave, right, or take paid leave?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. So, we see that dads having—and non-birthing parents taking equitable paid leave is good for the parent. It is good for the birthing parent and the mom, and it is good for baby.

In my home state in New York, women make up about half of New York's labor force, you know, and I think one of the things that we have seen in my personal experience, we have fully paid parental leave and we have had a couple of new dads in my office take it.

And one of the things that I have noticed so much is that after—you know, eventually we all go back to work and sometimes they come and bring baby—the baby and will be with our whole families together in gatherings, and we see that, too.

Moms say, thank you so much for letting my husband stay with me because I could not recover physically and handle a new baby and try to keep a home together all by myself.

And so I am wondering, Ms. Bigelow, how do you think this contributes to income inequity between, you know, new mothers and fathers—and anyone else on the panel feel free to chime in as well—or—

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlelady's time has expired, but the gentlewoman Bigelow may answer the question.

Ms. BIGELOW. So, I will just answer really quickly and say that no new mom should feel alone to recover from birth and get used to parenting, and I credit our own stability in my family to the fact that my husband was able to take 12 weeks paid paternity leave to the generous benefit provided by Congresswoman Nita Lowey.

And so we were able to really have a good start for our family because of that, and I can't imagine not having that if I were a low-wage worker.

Mr. KELLEY. Madam Chairman, can I just chime in there?

Chairwoman MALONEY. Yes, Mr. Kelley, you are recognized briefly.

Mr. KELLEY. Thank you so much. You know, paid parental leave has been a godsend for those who have to use it so far, right. I am a father, and I can recall those precious weeks after there was a new addition to the family. The new baby needs attention.

The whole family needs the care and love and attention that, you know, only can be provided given that they have no stress about being able to pay rent and other expenses. The vast majority of Federal employees, especially those young enough to be starting a family, do not earn enough to skip even one paycheck.

Take, for instance, I hear a lot of talk about how much Federal employees average a year. But when you take TSA workers that average about \$35,000 a year, you know, with a new family and you got to worry about the house, no car, no—and all of these bills and the stresses of those things, they will not be able to take off work and take care of the family, bond with that family, as necessary.

So, I just wanted to say that, and this FMLA leave is a necessary addition to the family parental leave. So, I appreciate everyone that is promoting this and that is sponsoring this. It is a necessary thing for under-paid Federal employees.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. The gentlelady's time has expired. She has yielded back.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Fallon, you are now recognized for your statement and questions.

Mr. FALLON. Madam Chair, thank you, and you can certainly say the great state of Texas anytime you like.

So, you know, interesting to hear some earlier rants and lectures about this. But, again, I always like to look at kind of some statistics and share with our colleagues and friends.

The Federal—and I hope I am getting all this right, but we have to trust some of the folks that we called for this research, that Federal employees—all the Federal employees are entitled to a pension once they are vested.

Private sector, according to the National Compensation Survey done by the Bureau of Labor, 12 percent of private sector employees get a pension. The paid sick leave in the private sector averages seven days a year and the Federal employees average 13.

Vacation—vacation is a little harder to quantify as far as average. But it looks like about 14 days with private sector and 20 days with the Federal employees.

Paid holidays, private sector it is eight and Federal employees it is now 11.

So, some of the things to consider. And sick leave, from what we were told that 13 days can be carried over to the next year and continue indefinitely. So after, say, 10 years, it is conceivable that a Federal employee could have banked 130 sick days.

And vacation, they can only carry over 240 hours, which is about 30 days and they are getting, once they are established and I am

talking about an employee that has been around for, say, seven years or plus, gets 20 days leave. But that would be a usual lose at their bank and bring it over to the 30.

So, in a given year, if you have an employee, a Federal employee, have about 180 days. Now, I don't know, and I suspect that they could use sick leave for maternity leave and if they cannot I would, certainly, support letting them use that 12 weeks to cash in. This is about saving.

I mean, we all are—we can't live day to day. We need to save money as best we can for that rainy day. That is what I was taught growing up and my parents are retired school teachers. My father retired after 25, 30 years service with all of making \$38,000 a year. But we saved for those rainy days.

And then you have to look at the cost of this. And it is hard to quantify because the—there is no CBO estimate, and nobody sought to ask the OPM.

So, there has been no due diligence on this, and it is—it is a dereliction of duty to vote on this or form an opinion when we don't even know the cost. That is what—we are the caretakers of the taxpayer dollars. The Federal employees work for the taxpayers.

I really, unfortunately, feel that this is a cover for a socialistic policy, and if 12 weeks is great, yes—I mean, and I owned a business, and I had an employee that had cancer and she was a loyal employee, and I told her her job—but I was in that position—her job was to get better and for two years I paid her. But that was the decision that we made, and it wasn't forced or compelled upon us by anyone.

And that is the difference between the private sector and the public sector, and particularly Federal employees.

And then I have heard for hours now the fact that, you know, apparently Americans are helpless and there is no such thing as personal responsibility, and there is certain decisions that you need to make.

I started out in the Air Force making \$18,500 a year and I had certain decisions. I didn't want to get married, and I didn't want to have children making \$18,500 a year. I was responsible enough to know that wasn't going to be a good outcome.

And I have—we have to trust the American people. Government is not God and governments have—and it is not a parent. It is a bad parent.

And with that, Madam Chair, from the great state of Texas, Pat Fallon yields back. Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. Thank you.

The gentlewoman from Missouri, the great state of Missouri, Ms. Bush, is recognized for five minutes.

Ms. BUSH. St. Louis and I thank you, Madam Chair, for convening this hearing.

Just sitting here listening to what some of my colleagues are saying is—absolutely just blows my mind. When we can—we can speak from a place of, you know, I have it and every—everything else should be great the same way that it is great for me.

But it is not that great for everybody and maybe we need to bring it back to that, that everybody doesn't have the same—if we don't have equity in this country, we don't have equality in this

country. And so maybe opening your eyes to see that there is somebody else that is suffering a different way than you.

And so, you know, I feel like, you know, the thing is this. We have to look at more than just our little square box.

But thank you for your leadership on this, Chairwoman, and the leadership of those on this committee.

The Federal Government now guarantees paid parental leave to its employees. We know paid parental leave is a strong start, but it is not at all enough leave for Federal workers or for workers, more broadly.

And I know this from personal experience. Twice in my life I have been fired or threatened with firing from a job for running out of paid leave or something related to the paid leave while I was too sick to work. Both incidents could have happened to anyone.

In one case, I was the victim of sexual violence. It was violence upon my body that I did not ask for, and because mental health isn't paid for, because when you have this mental health situation going on how do you keep your home? How do you keep—I almost lost my home. I almost lost my car. I almost lost everything because I couldn't deal with that sexual assault and it wasn't my fault.

The other one, I was t-boned in my car and I couldn't walk for weeks, and I remember, as a matter of fact, when I started to get a little bit better, Rep. Ocasio-Cortez came to be with me, and she literally carried me down the street. There's photos of that.

It is not that I didn't want to go to work. I physically could not be a nurse. You physically—it is not that people want free hand-outs. It is that, how do we take care of ourselves?

And this is the other thing. We also have to remember when you lose a staff person that has been with you, it costs a lot of money. It costs a lot of money to be able to get someone else in and train them and get them to the point of the skill and the talent, the knowledge, with that company that the other person had.

So, why not invest in the worker that you have? Why not give them the space that they need to heal? It is ridiculous the things that I am hearing today.

Imagine punishing a low-wage worker in response to a traumatic life event. You punish them for that trauma. Imagine a nurse being fired for being sick. Imagine trying to return to work but being unable to and being fired for it. Like me, millions of people don't have that, and they don't have to imagine it. It is a reality that happens every single day, and we see why.

Unfortunately, Federal workers are not guaranteed paid leave for any reason specified in the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 other than childcare. This leaves workers without affordable options when they have to take time off from work to address a health issue or take care of a family member.

Mr. Kelley, great to see you again and thank you for all your work. How would your members benefit if they had access to paid leave during other situations when they need to care for themselves or their families?

Mr. KELLEY. Can I just give you a story?

Ms. BUSH. Yes.

Mr. KELLEY. OK. Let me tell you a story about a young man, right. He had worked—he is a TSA worker—worked, you know, has a wife, you know, and his wife is diabetic.

A few months ago, had to have a kidney transplant. He had to use a lot of leave to take care of her, about two and a half months, right, because she was very ill after the transplant.

They had a son. They had been working to send him to college, right. Then a few weeks later, you know, the doctor discovered that the body was rejecting the kidney, OK. So, they had to go in and remove it. She became very ill.

So, that meant that he still wouldn't work again, OK. So, that became very stressful for the family, couldn't pay the bills, and the son that had worked so hard—to say go to college, I want you to go to college, I want you to be a productive citizen—the father had to ask him to come out of college and get a job in order to help them pay the bills so that they wouldn't leave their—lose their home, and all these things.

So, I just agree with you. Everybody don't have it like that. There are people and, you know, and pastoring for 31 years to sit here and hear the inhumanity of what I am hearing here today, that is supposed to be representing our country, supposed to be representing all of humanity, and there is no humanity in this. It bothers me.

Ms. BUSH. It bothers me—

Mr. KELLEY. You are telling me that people are not concerned about the well being of the American family. We are concerned with those that already got it. Everybody don't have it.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman's time has expired, and the chair recognizes herself shortly.

I just want to commend Ms. Bush for pointing out that public policy is not made on the goodness of one person's heart. One person can be very thoughtful and wonderful to their employees.

But there can be another situation where she pointed out where people are hurt unjustly in many ways and lose their jobs, lose their form of employment and way to provide for their families.

Public policy has to be made on what is best for the American people, and that is what we are discussing today. We are not voting on this bill today. We are having a debate and discussion on it.

I yield back and I now represent—I now recognize the gentleman from the great state of Georgia.

Mr. Clyde, you are now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. CLYDE. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member, for holding today's hearing, and yes, Georgia is a great state. Thank you.

Our country is facing several crises—the Biden border crisis, the Biden crime crisis, the Biden economic crisis, the Biden energy crisis, as we see gas prices go up and up and up, and the employment crisis.

I am constantly hearing, as I travel across my district, it is clear to me that families are hurting from inflation and are worried about illicit drugs flooding their communities because of the crisis at the southern border.

I am constantly hearing from small business owners about how labor shortages are plaguing their ability to hire talented workers.

Thankfully, Georgia's Governor, Brian Kemp, through his direct order, has ended the extra payments from the Federal Government so that we can get hard-working Georgians back to work.

I am a small businessman by trade, and I can tell you that small and even large businesses operate a whole lot differently than does the Federal Government.

I mean, the fact that the government, or should I say Congress, decides how much we will spend before even putting a budget together. Is that backward in and of itself?

Not to mention the fact that we are not required to balance our budget every year. No wonder our government is in such poor fiscal condition.

As a business owner, I had to work to bring in revenue, which was dependent on consumer demand, on customer service, on community engagement, on marketing, among other things.

You also must balance your budget as a small business owner and plan to make adjustments if times are good or if they are tough.

If times are good, and hopefully they stay good, benefits typically become more generous than the basic benefits employers provide to retain quality employees.

But when times are tough, sometimes you have to adjust to keep people on the payroll because you don't want to let anybody go. You want to keep all your good employees.

To the contrary, if the government wants to increase its revenue stream, all it does—all it has to do is raise taxes, easy as that. Flip a switch and more money flows in.

But who pays the price for flipping that switch? The American people, and if we don't have the money now, we borrow it. And so who pays the price? Our children.

So, for Ms. Manning, I have a question for you. I just outlined some ways in which the government operates differently from private employers and I briefly touched on differences in benefits in good times and bad times.

Do the benefits for Federal employees get adjusted down when times are tough?

Ms. MANNING. To my knowledge, they do not.

Mr. CLYDE. They do not. You are absolutely right.

So, it sounds like the Federal Government's benefits are completely stable. And yet, with all these advantages we are sitting here today considering the chairwoman's proposal to further expand the already generous benefits for Federal employees.

What do you think that says to the average American, saying that their Federal employee counterparts are getting more benefits than private citizens who are struggling to recover from the pandemic? What do you think that says to the American people, ma'am?

Ms. MANNING. You know, I think we struggle as a country to maintain wide respect for any type of large institution, whether it is the media or the government or academic institutions.

I would love to see greater public trust in those institutions. But I don't think it fosters good public trust when we feel that there is an elite political class who can vote new benefits for themselves

or for the Federal work force, and that often, I think, fosters a sense of detachment from the citizens that you serve.

Mr. CLYDE. I agree with you. Do you think the Federal Government needs to make its benefits even more generous than they already are right now to compete for labor?

Ms. MANNING. No. As an economic question, I think it is pretty clear there is no economic necessity with that.

Mr. CLYDE. OK. Well, thank you. I appreciate that very much.

You know, it is one thing to provide a benefit like this during an extraordinary period, like COVID-19. But it is another entirely to make this a permanent benefit for all times, good and bad.

Thank you for your response. I appreciate that. You know, I am a 28-year military officer and 11 years of that was spent on active duty. And the military gives 30 days of paid leave every year, but that 30 days includes weekends.

So, if I take straight 30 days, then I have four weekends. I have eight days of weekend days that are included in that paid leave.

While I know signing up for active duty is much different than signing up for the civilian work force, you know, both are public servants and at the end of the day their salaries are paid by the taxpayers.

So, in my opinion, it is egregious that we are sitting here today considering a proposal that would only require Federal civil servants to work nine months of the year. It is an affront to our servicemen and women who sacrifice everything, as well as to taxpayers who will be on the hook to pay for the additional benefits.

And with that, from the great state of Georgia, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

And the gentleman from Illinois, the great state of Illinois, Mr. Davis, is now recognized.

Mr. DAVIS. Well, thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

You know, as I was listening to the Biden crisis, I was just reminded that President Biden has done more for low-and moderate-income children and families than we have seen in this country since the Great Society program.

Mr. CLYDE. Well, he's admitting that it's the Biden programs—

Mr. DAVIS. And so that is one way of dealing with and addressing crisis.

But we are really talking about something else at the moment. I am in favor of paid family medical leave. As a matter of fact, not only am I in favor of it, I introduced it, and so I am definitely in favor of it.

I was just wondering, though, because I have always been taught that a satisfied work force is far more productive than a work force that is not satisfied.

So, when we start talking about costs, if we keep the work force satisfied they are going to be more productive, according to all of the research and all of the studies that I have ever heard anything about.

Of course, Illinois is a great state. But I represent a large number of people in Chicago who are disproportionately among those lacking paid leave benefits, often because they are single parents or grandparents, caregivers who need caregiving flexibility. They

are often lower paid individuals in the work force and don't get all of the benefits that others might get.

Ms. Shabo, let me ask you, my congressional district has one of the highest percentages of children being cared for by their grandparents. The burden of care giving often falls heavily on African-American women, with many of these grandmothers working, caring for young children and aging family members, and also dealing with their own medical issues.

Could you discuss why a broad definition of family is needed to make sure that everyone who needs it can get the family caregiving leave and get their needs met?

Ms. SHABO. Thank you so much for the question. You know, like constituents in your district, families across the country come in all shapes and sizes.

They are caring for different members of their family. They treat—members of their family require care and different people may be available.

But too often, policies leave extended family members behind—grandparents, grandchildren, siblings, adult children, and others who folks care for like family.

Fourteen percent of workers who needed but didn't take an FMLA leave in 2018 said that they couldn't because they were caring for somebody who wasn't covered by the FMLA.

One of the great innovations in state-paid family and medical leave programs is that every single one of them now covers a broader definition of family.

And this is incredibly important, particularly for families of color, for families with people who have disabilities, for LGBTQ families, and for women in particular, who bear the brunt of caregiving, whether it is paid or unpaid, or whether they have to leave their jobs in order to provide care for those who they love.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kelley, I have heard a lot about the number of days that Federal employees have to work. Do you know any rules that require individuals to take all of the family medical leave that they may have available to them?

Mr. KELLEY. There is no rule, sir. And what I would like—if I might add just a little bit, I think we should refocus on what this discussion is all about, right, because every Federal employee would not be able to take four months of leave.

That is not what this is all about, and to propose that would be a lot. It will be a lot to the American people, because if you think about, you know, how many Federal employees will have a person in their family that will fall into the category that they will be able to take, you know, these 12 weeks, it is just not the truth.

It is not true, even to the fact that I heard earlier that Federal employees haven't given up anything. But it is not true. If you remember back in 2013 and 2014, it was Federal employees that gave up retirement benefits. They was cut. You know, it was the Federal employee, you know, and all of this pay was for the extended unemployment insurance. And remember that we are not political appointees. We are Federal employees, and to bring these untruths for today really bothers me.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you.

The gentleman from the great state of Vermont, Mr. Welch, you are now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. Welch?

Mr. WELCH. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I am going to be asking a few questions of Eric Sorkin very shortly, but I just want to introduce it by saying a little bit about his business.

He and his wife, Laura, created a business called Runamok Maple. It produces the tastiest product in the world, and that is Vermont maple syrup, and they have grown it into a business with 75 employees.

And we are very, very proud of our small businesses and Runamok Maple, and I know that my colleagues have similar stories about successful small businesses in their districts.

And the question here about family leave is one where the debate is about whether government should play a role, and Mr. Keller said we should leave this up to individual businesses.

And the reality is that most businesses, I think, are like the Sorkins'. If they can, they want to do whatever is possible for their employees. It is like a family, and I think is universal across the country. But there is a question of whether all businesses can do it.

So, Mr. Sorkin, I want to welcome you and ask you if you could say why it is important for small businesses that the Federal Government does offer a national paid family and medical leave benefit.

Does a national policy help level the playing field with business competitors who may not be able to or don't want to provide the same benefit to their employees?

Mr. SORKIN. Thank you, Representative Welch.

Absolutely. I completely agree. I guess from my perspective that it is not—it shouldn't be about whether a worker is working for a company that can afford to do it or not. We do it and that is a burden on us, irrespective of the fact that we feel like there is a good return on that investment.

I don't see the downside to having a national program that would help workers. It would help us as well. You know, when we are recruiting, and we talked a lot about how hard it is to recruit right now, you know, we are at a significant disadvantage to bigger companies that can afford to do it. So, it would absolutely be leveling the playing field.

Mr. WELCH. Right. And as I understand it, you and your wife responded to a human situation. You had a valued employee whose wife had terminal cancer. He couldn't lose the paycheck. He couldn't be home, and he was caught between a rock and a hard place and you guys decided, hey, this is our employee. We trust him, value him, and we want to let him do what we would like to do on our own if the circumstances were reversed.

Is that correct?

Mr. SORKIN. That is absolutely right.

Mr. WELCH. And without any support. You had to eat the cost of that?

Mr. SORKIN. That is right.

Mr. WELCH. Right. And so, you mentioned the effect on morale in your company that you did institute this. And by the way, to my colleagues, 75 employees is a small business. It is a big deal in Vermont.

And by the way, maple syrup, it is a lot of hard work. You are out in the woods getting that maple syrup that we just get on our breakfast table.

But tell—me tell us a little bit about how it affected morale in your company.

Mr. SORKIN. Well, I mean, it has been—you know, a few weeks ago there was a statistic that, I think, Vermont had the tightest labor market in the country. I believe it was 5.1 job postings for every—for every person on unemployment.

We recently posted a position for production associates. We have several that we are hiring for, and we received about 150 applications in a few weeks.

Mr. WELCH. That is—

Mr. SORKIN. Yes, we are pretty well known for our policies, and I am fairly certain that is part of why we continue.

Mr. WELCH. That is great. Let me ask you this. What impact did the Family First Coronavirus Response Act have on your company? Would your business have survived the pandemic without a federally funded paid leave policy?

Mr. SORKIN. It made our decisions easier, and it kept our business and our employees healthy. It was—it was essential, no doubt about it.

Mr. WELCH. Well, I want to thank you, because I think you have been a successful small business. We know how hard it is to make an enterprise like yours successful.

And your point about a level playing field so that all employers have this option where they are not putting themselves at a competitive disadvantage if they choose to help their employees, I think, is very compelling.

Thank you, and Madam Chair, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman from the great state of Georgia, Mr. Hice, is now recognized.

Mr. Hice?

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Manning, let me come to you. Democrats have not provided any information on this bill regarding the cost. Would you anticipate that this piece of legislation would be a good idea for the American taxpayer?

Ms. MANNING. I am sure it comes with some costs. You know, unfortunately, we don't know what that cost is. But, simply, the term "paid leave" implies that someone is paying for it. So, there is—someone has to be paid, someone has to pay.

Mr. HICE. Do you have any idea what type of, just a estimate, something like this might cost?

Ms. MANNING. No, especially given that Federal workers already have paid parental leave. So, we are just talking about the addi-

tional marginal cost of other medical paid leaves that would fall outside of the parental leave category. I don't know. But it would come with some cost.

Mr. HICE. Yes, and I would think the cost would be rather significant, and it just seems to me the logical progression of dealing with legislation in a responsible manner, that if you are going to pass legislation that is going to have a significant price tag associated with it, it would be a good idea to know what that price tag is, especially in behalf of the taxpayers.

Ms. MANNING. Certainly, and I think that is true, regardless how lawmakers feel, you know, or members of the public.

If we feel that paid leave is a right or something that everyone should be entitled to, the question still remains, how do we manage limited resources, how do we pay for the things that we want people to have?

And that is true of both paid leave for Federal workers and a broader Federal program that might provide paid leave or pay replacement for all workers.

Mr. HICE. Well, beyond the cost factor is also this whole question of assessing how do you work your work force—what is the impact that something like this would have on the work force.

I mean, if we are dealing with something like this, I shared in my opening statement, we are talking 12 weeks plus other holidays and benefits. A Federal worker, really, we are talking working eight months out of a year, potentially. So, we have four months of a gap.

How does the private sector—how could anyone deal with employees who are gone a third of the time?

Ms. MANNING. Well, you know, I think there is a variety of downsides that would come with a national paid leave program and it is not just the cost in terms of new taxes. Of course, I believe that deserves examination as well.

But when we talk about a paid leave entitlement that would apply broadly to the Nation, first of all, we have talked about—we have recognized that many employers in the private sector have already acted to put in place some kind of paid leave benefit for their employees and, in some cases, paternal leave and medical leave.

When you establish a national standard through a Federal program, you immediately reorient all of those individualized private solutions that employers/employees have worked out between themselves and you start to create an incentive for employers to simply comply with the Federal standard and pay for the national entitlement rather than go directly to their work force, to their workers, and say, what can we work out, what kind of flexible arrangement works for you, how many weeks do you want, do you want to come back part time or full time or virtual, and so forth.

And there are myriad different solutions that work for different industries, different workers, different seasons of life that workers might be in, and so we ought to be, at a time where the American economy and businesses and families are more diverse than they have ever been, encouraging those diverse solutions rather than coming forward with a one-size-all fit solution.

Mr. HICE. Well, I agree with you, and at a bare minimum I think that any private company dealing with this type of policy would at

least have, I would think, an assessment of sorts to determine the impact that something like this would have on their work force.

Do you know of any such assessment that has taken place on the Federal Government to determine the impact that this would have on the work force?

Ms. MANNING. I do not.

Mr. HICE. OK. And just a last question. I know you have touched on this. But coming out of COVID, which we all, thank God, we are coming out of, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, but there is no question so many businesses have been kicked in the gut, individual families, livelihoods across the board.

Many of them have lost everything they have had. Some of them just inched their way through and now trying to recover. Even a bill like this, were it to become law and be enacted, do you think that is a good idea timing wise for so many private individuals who have just suffered tremendously?

Ms. MANNING. Well, I certainly think it is the case that one of the biggest economic problems, particularly for Americans who are in poverty or on the brink of poverty, is the lack of an income, full stop.

They need a job. They need income. And the requirement that or the suggestion that those jobs have to come with a full plate of benefits, whether it is health insurance or an increased minimum wage or these paid leave proposals that we are talking about today, that simply increases the cost of creating those jobs that Americans desperately need and want in order to provide for themselves and their families.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Ms. Manning.

And with that, I will yield back. Thank you.

Ms. PORTER. [Presiding.] Thank you very much.

The chair now recognizes herself for five minutes for questioning.

Ms. Bigelow, you have said that you worked from the day that you gave birth to your child. Could you explain, briefly, why you felt like you had to be working up to the very last moment before you gave birth?

Ms. BIGELOW. Sure, and after, too, that day, because every moment was really critical to getting the most time that was paid for me after—after my FMLA started, and it was unpaid.

So I knew that, like, if he was going to be in the NICU for 10 days if I could still do some work there, and that would buy me 10 extra days to actually bond with my baby.

Ms. PORTER. That really resonates with me. I had three children while teaching as a professor, and I was scheduled to teach a class on the day of my planned Cesarean section with my third child, and the dean, ultimately, prevailed on me to reschedule and cancel that class. But I really felt the need to use all of the time that I could.

And I know you said that you returned to work sooner. What was—what motivated that? Was it the stress about your family's financial stability? Was it concern about your career? How did that affect your decisions about giving birth and having a child and how it intersected with work?

Ms. BIGELOW. So, I did take 12 weeks off, but instead of only missing one or two paychecks I ended up missing more because I

took time off when I was in the hospital and I took time off for all of those appointments.

And there was a government shutdown in between, so it was a very stressful time, you know, just trying to juggle all the finances of having a new baby, having a new house, and all those things.

And so, it was, you know, a very difficult decision to try to be determined and try—and to be there for my family because I knew that was going to be more important than a job.

Ms. PORTER. You have also written about your mother's fear of taking time off from her retail job to care for you. Can you talk about what that meant for your family?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes, and I think people are very—they grow up and you have a reaction to how your environment is, and it made me, you know, really dedicated to this work and to know that I needed to fight for the kinds of policies in workplaces that didn't cause fear for workers.

And I think for my mom, and when she was trying to take care of me, she always was worried that I would be sick. She was worried that she could be sick, and that created a lot of stress in our household.

And I know that impacts everyone's health, and those are things that I really didn't want to pass on for my family.

Ms. PORTER. Well, and I think it is clear that the need for paid leave is not new, although the pandemic may have exacerbated or reignited interest in this issue.

The reality is that we have multiple generations now of working women and families that have been harmed by a lack of paid leave and it has disproportionately hurt people who work particularly in industries like retail and food services, for whom even a few days of unpaid paid time off could jeopardize their job or their ability to put food on the table.

Ms. SHABO, turning to you, how much do American families lose each year in income as a result of insufficient paid leave policy?

Ms. SHABO. Thanks for the question, Representative Porter.

The Center for American Progress estimates \$22.5 billion lost to families every year because of a lack of paid leave or ineffective—insufficient paid leave.

Ms. PORTER. Twenty-two point five billion dollars is an awful lot of groceries, an awful lot of diapers, an awful lot of utility bills that people are going without.

And about how many workers are we talking about here who contribute to that \$22.5 billion? How many workers are being harmed by this?

Ms. SHABO. Yes. I mean, around 20 million workers a year take paid leave—take FMLA leave, and only a small share of those are paid adequately or paid at all.

Ms. PORTER. And we have talked about a lot of—and, you know, some of my colleagues in this committee hearing today have talked about this as a, you know, progressive priority. This is a women's issue. This is a kid's issue.

Ms. SHABO, who is hurt by the lack of paid leave in this country?

Ms. SHABO. Everybody is hurt by the lack of paid leave in this country, whether it is you directly or the economy or a business. This is not an—it is not a frill. It is a necessity for getting our

economy back on track and creating households that are stable and secure, going forward.

Ms. PORTER. Are men hurt by a lack of paid leave?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely. We did a report at New America on men and care giving, including a big national survey, finding that men want to be able to provide care. They want to be able to be there for their families. But, you know, not only is it a matter of not having access to pay or fearing for your job, it's also stigma around the gendered nature of care, and when men want to break out of that mold they have a hard time.

Ms. PORTER. How about Democrats? Do they—Democratic workers want to take paid leave?

Ms. SHABO. All workers want to take paid leave. All workers want to know that paid leave is there for them when they need it, and that is why we see in polls before the pandemic, during the pandemic, now, 85 percent of workers want national paid leave.

That is 75 percent of Republicans, 80 something percent of independents, and 95 percent of Democrats. The only place this is a partisan issue is in the halls of Congress, and in some legislatures but not all legislatures.

So, we have seen laws passed with bipartisan support in Oregon and Washington and Massachusetts, and there is no need for the partisan division here. This is common sense.

Ms. PORTER. Absolutely. And so Republican workers, Democratic workers, independent voters, voters, workers who vote, workers who don't vote. People are having families and it affects not just the worker, but it affects the work force, broadly.

And so, one of the things I say over and over again, and I just want to say it here to echo what you just said, that paid leave is not something that we do just for women, just for kids, just for progressives, just for whatever.

Paid leave is something we do for everyone, whether you have never had a child or never want one, whether you are 50 years past your childbearing years or you are just entering them.

Paid leave makes our economy stronger, and I don't think there is any American who shouldn't want our country to have a strong globally competitive economy and we can't do that without paid leave.

Thank you very much.

I am now going to recognize Mr. Johnson, the gentleman from Tennessee, for five minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON. OK. I want to thank the chairwoman for holding this hearing, and this issue of paid family and medical leave is one that is so important, and I thank the witnesses today for their testimony and advocacy efforts because Americans faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic—600,000 dead, 34 million infected, and many people are still living with life-altering health consequences.

And the experiences of our constituents have shown us that the Federal Government must implement a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy and we must do so now.

It is a shameful tribute that it has taken us this long. The moment is here, and we must not let this moment pass. Even my home state of Georgia, which is ground zero for voter suppression,

recently established three weeks of paid parental leave for state employees.

While we still have plenty of work left to do, this advancement was the latest result of tireless work by advocates from across the state and the Nation, and I want to applaud you for your efforts, and I know that those efforts will continue.

I keep hearing from my friends on the other side of the aisle today about the costs of paid family and medical leave to the taxpayers, and that we can't afford to do family medical leave.

I would remind my friends that it is the working people who pay the taxes, not the wealthy and the corporations. They don't pay taxes because of all the loopholes in the tax code that they use to shelter their income.

And everyone will—we will never forget the Trump Republican Party tax cut of 2017, which cut \$5.8 trillion dollars in taxes for 83 percent—excuse me, for the top one percent.

Eighty-three percent of that \$5.8 trillion in tax cuts went to the top one percent, while at the same time raising taxes on working people to try to fill the hole in the Federal deficit.

Yet, it is those same wealthy people and corporate interests, most notably the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Koch brothers, and others, who have the biggest influence on policy because of their ability to spend dark money, putting pro-business politicians in office who do their bidding rather than serve the people.

Big business and the politicians who support them are the ones who oppose family and medical leave protections for workers and working people who pay the taxes should be able to allocate their taxes to support themselves during their times of need rather than subsidizing the wealthy who don't pay taxes.

Ms. Bigelow, in 2018, the National Partnership for Women and Families conducted a nationwide survey on paid leave. What did the survey reveal about American workers' support or lack thereof for the concept of paid family and medical leave?

Ms. BIGELOW. Thank you, Congressman, for that question.

We have actually done a number of different surveys beyond 2018 and even as recently as last year, and we always find that paid leave has bipartisan support, and it has a majority of support from Republicans, Democrats, and independents.

Mr. JOHNSON. Yes, in fact, 94 percent of Democrats and 73 percent of Republicans supported paid leave. Isn't that correct?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes, that sounds right.

Mr. JOHNSON. Now, these numbers are staggering, and I can't think of another policy proposal with such bipartisan support. But yet, states across the Nation have not been responsive to public support for expanded and comprehensive paid leave policies.

What factors are contributing to the failure of states to pass laws requiring that workers receive paid leave?

Ms. BIGELOW. Well, you know, I will say there has been a lot of momentum in the states over the past few years to pass paid leave laws. But I really think it is time for a national policy, for a national standard.

And so, while our campaigns still are being started in different states, I think what we are seeing in, like, a lot of—a lot of these

areas, it is a bipartisan issue. But we are also working to get a national—yes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Well, you are right about that. What is stopping us from getting a national paid leave policy passed?

Ms. BIGELOW. I think there is a lot of misconceptions about what this means and, particularly, it sounds like the cost issue. The fact of the matter—

Mr. JOHNSON. And so—and so those who are not paying the costs want to—want to dictate to those who are paying the cost what—how to allocate that money. It is really quite—

Ms. PORTER. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. JOHNSON. It is really quite ridiculous. And with that, I will yield back.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you so much, sir.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky for five minutes.

Mr. Comer, you are on mute, sir. We look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't know where to begin. I have been sitting patiently listening to the comments from my Democrat colleagues. I sat through the technical difficulties of having a virtual hearing when we could all be right down the hall in the committee room.

You know, one thing that Representative Davis said, he said, you know, we need to keep the Federal work force satisfied. I mean, that is a disconnect with reality—with the reality of the taxpayers.

The Federal work force needs to keep the taxpayer satisfied with the production and with the way their tax dollars are being spent.

We just had a briefing with the VA. Right now, if a veteran calls any of our offices and asks for their VA records, it may take a year for them to get the—to get their records from the VA. The VA—I asked the question, are your workers back to work yet? Oh, no. No. It is still—you know, it is still dangerous to be out there.

Well, those poor veterans. You know, people in the private sector have had to go back to work. We just passed the Juneteenth bill last week with overwhelming bipartisan support that gave the Federal workers another day off, and the next committee hearing we have in Oversight talk about more Federal benefits and perks, for Federal employees.

The biggest problem in America right now is workers can't find employees. They can't find employees. Factories aren't at full production. Our economy isn't anywhere near its potential because of the policies of the Biden administration, the policies to pay people to continue to work—to continue to not work, to sit at home.

And with all the problems in America right now, with all the hearings that we have pleaded to have with the majority, we have a border crisis. We have a crime crisis in the big cities.

We have inflation. We have credible evidence that shows, despite your all calling it conspiracy theories, that COVID started in Wuhan. You don't want to have any hearings on that. Nothing on that.

You know, we are not blaming you all for COVID. We are blaming China for COVID. We want to have hearings—bipartisan hearings on that.

You want to give Federal workers more benefits, more—continue to pay people not to work. It is just a total disconnect.

It's a total disconnect, and it highlights the differences between what Republicans in the House are pushing for and fighting for, and what Democrats in the House are fighting for.

Ms. Manning, what should the process be to consider paid leave vacation, to fully understand the costs, tradeoffs, and consequences?

Ms. MANNING. Well, every employer will have to do their own cost benefit analysis. The Federal Government has to do a cost benefit analysis, and it sounds like there hasn't been sufficient exploration of the costs without a cost estimate from CBO or elsewhere.

But other private employers have to make a different calculus, their own cost-benefit analysis based on their work force, their retention, their attractiveness to workers and so forth, and what makes the most sense for them.

Mr. COMER. So, you would agree that the process—this bill hasn't gone through an appropriate process to be able to determine the costs and the effects on production and the consequences? What is your biggest concern with this bill?

Ms. MANNING. Well, my biggest concern with the bill and more so the hearing and the way that this issue is being presented is, you know, I would be careful not to misconstrue public support for the concept of paid leave and support for a particular policy, especially without a full examination of the tradeoffs and downsides associated with that proposal.

So, for example, the Family Act, which is the leading proposal to establish a national comprehensive paid leave entitlement, comes with a very significant downside.

And I appreciate lawmakers' concern about low-income workers, but it would establish a regressive payroll tax that would cost low-income workers and families, and those are the folks who are least likely to benefit from programs like this one, as we have seen demonstrated in several of the states that have experimented with programs like this and several countries abroad that have experimented with programs like this.

It is a regressive policy that redistributes wealth from low-income people to upper and middle-income families.

Mr. COMER. I agree completely. Thank you for your comments. I want to thank all the witnesses for being here and I want to add to that, inflation is a regressive tax and the policies of this administration are creating inflation, which is a tax on low-income and poor families.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mr. KELLEY. Madam Chair, may I—may I speak to something I just heard?

Ms. PORTER. Yes. Please pause. Just hang on one second, please, Mr. Kelley.

Mr. KELLEY. No problem. No problem. Yes.

[Pause.]

Ms. PORTER. I am sorry, Mr. Kelley. I am going to move on to Mr. Sarbanes, the gentleman from Maryland, and hopefully you will have a chance to speak again later in the hearing.

Mr. Sarbanes, you are now recognized for five minutes.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks very much, Madam Chair. Actually, I am going to be asking Mr. Kelley a question so he may want to take a chance to offer his thoughts that he had.

I am hitting some of the high points that have already been covered, but I think it is important.

So again, in 2020, we know that Congress passed the bipartisan—I emphasize that bipartisan—Families First Coronavirus Response Act, the FFCRA, which had two major provisions related to paid leave.

As we know, the first provided 12 weeks of partially compensated family and medical leave for coronavirus-related care giving reasons, including for childcare and schools where daycare centers were closed due to the pandemic.

The second provision provided up to two weeks of paid sick leave for reasons related to the pandemic. The FFCRA also included tax credits. This was very important for employers to help them cover costs for this paid leave.

And then in March 2021, when we passed the American Rescue Plan, it extended the tax credits to businesses, also provided additional paid family medical leave for Federal employees for coronavirus-related reasons.

Mr. Kelley, many Federal employees, including your members, have been on the front lines of the government's response to the pandemic. Of course, this includes many essential workers who continued to work onsite throughout the pandemic.

How have the Federal Government's coronavirus leave policies helped Federal employees take care of themselves and their families while at the same time serving their nation?

Mr. KELLEY. Well, you know, and that is a good question, and I appreciate it, too. But the passing of these bills has helped tremendously, OK, because a person don't have to worry about the stress of going to job, and the possibility of being contracted with this virus but they are still able to, you know, perform for the American people.

You know, and so it is very important that this bill was passed. OK. But I want to just say that this is about, you know, emergencies—emergency situations. I also want to reiterate the fact that, you know, the VA never stopped working. That's what I wanted to comment on earlier, if I may.

The VA never stopped working. Telework is working from home. Not not working at all, but it is working from home. And as a matter of fact, production went up. Telework and paid leave made it possible to keep things going, OK, and that is the point that I wanted to make earlier, and it is just in line with the question that you asked.

Mr. SARBANES. Well, actually, I appreciate you mentioning telework just because I have worked on that issue for many, many years, proud of the Telework Improvement Act that we passed here in Congress.

It was signed into law a few years back, which really upgraded the telework policies across the Federal Government in a way that did, as you say, contribute to productivity in very measurable ways.

And I assume that the policies we put in place that we are discussing today that helped Federal workers during the pandemic

were also really critical in terms of keeping the employee morale high, or at least not taking a huge hit at a time when people were feeling a lot of stress.

So, that is one of the reasons it is—it is so important.

Ms. Shabo, I wanted to get your views on the effect that these leave provisions in the FFCRA and the American Rescue Plan have on the private sector. In other words, what role did they play in helping workers and businesses weather the pandemic?

Ms. SHABO. That is a great question. Thank you so much.

You know, the FFCRA put in place for the first time ever paid sick leave and paid childcare leave that was required of certain businesses and available to certain employees.

It is estimated to have prevented 15 million COVID cases per day nationwide at the height of the pandemic. Businesses were able to get tax credits to reimburse them for the leave that they were required to provide.

In December, the requirement went away. The tax credits remained, which is great for businesses that take them. But this is leaving behind millions of workers and it is why we can't ever go back to a situation where workers don't have access to paid leave and where the private sector doesn't have the support that it needs in guaranteeing access to paid leave.

And that is why a policy like the Family Act or the American Families Plan or the Neal Building an Economy for Families Act is so critical because it will put in place the stability that businesses and workers need, going forward, for public health emergencies like COVID, and for individual family situations and emergencies in perpetuity.

You know, the private sector, I think, during COVID saw that government could provide support for paid leave, and businesses like Eric's here benefited from it.

Mr. SARBANES. Thanks very much.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. PORTER. The chair now recognizes Ms. Speier, the gentlelady from California.

Ms. SPEIER. Thanks, Madam Chair.

Let me just start off by commenting on what my good colleague, Mr. Comer said. He hasn't ever had a baby. So, maybe he thinks it is a vacation.

But for those of us who have been moms, who have given birth to children, it is no vacation. It is stressful, it is challenging, and his comment is truly insulting to every mother in this country.

Second, I think we have lost sight of what this is all about. This is about creating a national program where both the employee and the employer will contribute so that there will be the opportunity for paid leave for employees.

Now, we already know that only 19 percent of the employees in this country have paid leave, and for those that are concerned that this is somehow going to impact poor people, well, poor people have even less opportunity for paid family leave now. It is, like, eight percent.

So, you know, we are the only industrialized country in the world that has this caveman attitude about parental leave, and we have got to grow up.

We have got to recognize that it takes a two-income family to make it in this country today, and we have got to make it easier on both parents.

And I am just going to speak about one bill in particular and ask for some commentary on it. Believe it or not, our service members do not have the same parental leave benefits that our Federal employees have, and I guess the question I have is, are my Republican colleagues willing to support a bipartisan bill, co-authored by Congresswoman Bice and Congressman Joyce, to equalize that for the men and women in our country who will put their lives on the line, but whose parental leave is less than what it is for Federal employees?

Let me start with Ms. Shabo. Why do you think these kinds of benefits are important for all but, particularly, for service members?

MS. SHABO. Well, reams of research show the importance of gender-equal parental leave in terms of maternal health, child outcomes, fathers' engagements. For service members, if we are serious about creating a diverse and inclusive military, we have to ensure equitable parental leave.

This means that male service members will be able to take care of their new children at equal levels. It will make the Federal—the military service, again, competitive.

It will help ensure that as young people who enter the military make decisions about whether to stay, it will make them more likely to stay.

I actually had a law student working with me. He and his wife actually both left the military as they were thinking about having children because of the inequitable paid leave and the lack of paid leave for dads.

So, this is a real issue for military readiness and competitiveness, and more than that, we also need to destigmatize care giving that is so often falling on women and holding women behind, including in the military.

So, for all those reasons, I think that bill is really important, and creating equity between the genders in military service for parental leave is critically important.

MS. SPEIER. Thank you.

Mr. Kelley, you are an Army veteran and former Army civilian employee, and I think you are also aware of the challenges for our families of the Reserve and National Guard, and they have no comprehensive paid leave policies to support these military families.

Can you comment on the burdens and stress associated with that?

Mr. KELLEY. Yes, I think the burden and the stresses is the same as anyone else, right, and we have heard throughout the day of how it is a burden on any family member, right, that doesn't have the paid leave.

I mean, the fact that if you are, you know, not able to spend time with your family, your newborn baby, or whatever, you know, it stresses, right. There is just stress all around.

So, I think the impact for the military is the same impact that you have for anyone else. So, I think it is a benefit that everyone should be able to share.

Ms. SPEIER. Thank you. And let me just close by saying, at one point in my congressional office I had two of my staff members out on parental leave, my chief of staff and one of my leg staff, for three months, and the sky didn't fall.

We were able to conduct business, do the job, and it was a great benefit to them, and they were very grateful for it.

So, if we are truly a country that supports family values, it is time to show it.

And with that, I yield back.

Ms. PORTER. Thank you very much.

The chair now recognizes Ms.—the gentlewoman from Illinois, Ms. Kelly, for five minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

You know, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle argue that Federal employee benefits are already generous, and they are—and that Federal employees don't need another leave benefit.

I would like to remind my colleagues about the 35-day-long government shutdown from December 22, 2018, to January 25, 2019. During that time, 800,000 Federal employees were either on furlough or were working without pay.

More than 60 percent of those workers reported exhausting their savings during the shutdown, which tracks with the 63 percent of Americans who don't have enough savings to cover a \$500 emergency. Federal workers endure the same hardships and financial insecurities as many of their fellow Americans.

Mr. Kelley, can you tell us about what kind of financial hardships Federal employees have endured during the 2019 shutdown, the pandemic, or even over the course of their careers?

Mr. KELLEY. Again, that is so—a great question. You know, think about the—and you have heard me reference TSA quite a bit, right. Think about the fact that this TSA work force average about \$35,000 a year, OK, and not getting paid, but still having to travel back and forth to work in a metropolitan area like New York City, like Washington, DC, OK.

They have to go back and forth to work. You know, they have to take care of childcare and all these types of things, you know, and they are not getting a paycheck. You know, some of them lost their homes, right. Some of them couldn't get back and forth to the doctor.

I mean, it was all kind of crisis coming up, you know, and that is just with the TSA work force. But throughout America, there was all kinds of employees that were being affected, you know, because, like you said, you know, \$500 is a lot to a lot of people and they couldn't work, right.

They weren't getting paid, you know, and they couldn't come up with the house note. They couldn't come up with a car note, and many of them lost their homes, lost automobiles, and those type of things.

Sure go back and rectify, you know, what is going to happen in the future. But it didn't help the fact that many of those employees lost their homes. Many of them, you know, lost their

[inaudible] if you will

[inaudible] the American work force.

Ms. KELLY. And thank you for that.

While the Federal work force falls within this committee's jurisdiction, I support comprehensive paid family and medical leave for all workers.

Ms. Shabo, can you explain to us why paid family and medical leave is not some superfluous perk, but an essential requirement for the health and prosperity of American workers and businesses?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely, Representative Kelly. Thank you.

Paid leave is essential for all of us because, at one time or another, every single working person is going to need to take time to care for themselves, to care for a loved one, or to welcome a child into their family.

And yet, now just one in five workers and just five percent of lower-wage workers have access to paid family leave. This means families are losing, on average, a thousand dollars a year.

Families in the aggregate are using 20—are losing \$20.5 billion a year. Businesses are incurring costs up to 200 percent of the cost of turnover when workers leave, and the economy itself is losing out. Five hundred billion dollars a year is estimated that paid leave—lack of paid leave before the pandemic.

The flip side, McKinsey estimates that the GDP of the U.S. could grow by \$2.4 trillion if we address gender inequities, and paid family and medical leave is a big part of that.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you so much, and I yield back the balance of my time. But thank both of you so much.

Chairwoman MALONEY. [Presiding.] The gentlelady yields back.

And the gentlewoman from the great state of Massachusetts, Ms. Pressley, is recognized.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

All I can think about as I have been sitting here is there but for the grace of God go I. Many of my colleagues today have really proved that our greatest deficit as a nation is not one of resource, but of empathy.

Our greatest wealth as a nation is the health of our people, and a meaningful, universal, and permanent paid leave policy is about the health of our people, about the stabilization of our families.

So, many of your opinions fly in the face of what you often characterize as your promotion of family values. This really flies in the face of that and, furthermore, proves that you value people's labor, in the traditional sense, more than you do their very lives.

As someone who had the honor of being a care giver to my mother in the final weeks of her life as she valiantly battled leukemia, although I was away from work, I was certainly not off.

It requires great emotional and physical labor, and there is no place else in the world that I would have rather been to support my mother in her transition.

Your comments not only dishonor parents, people who have grown their family through adoption, but the millions of caregivers who, in this moment, feel alone and unseen, you have just contributed to that hurt.

But let me get to my questions.

Ms. Bigelow, there has been a long and inaccurate assumption that people with disabilities are only the recipients of care, and not the providers of care, when the reality is that people with disabili-

ities play both roles and often face barriers to benefits and services as a result.

Can you elaborate on the importance of centering people with disabilities in any effort to advance universal paid family and medical leave?

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes, thank you, Congresswoman, for this question. It is a really important point to make.

People with disabilities are a valuable part of our communities and our work force. A disability-inclusive paid leave program can help support people with disabilities to more fully participate in the economy and have economic independence.

A recent analysis of FMLA data found that nearly 16 percent of workers who took any leave in the past 12 months may have done so for a disability, and nearly one-third of those workers with a disability also had at least one child under 18.

So, it is important to remember that workers with disability already have lower incomes, meaning they are less likely to have savings to rely on. So, centering them in the paid family and medical leave policy will really help bring a financial lifeline to them, which is part of their economic stability.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you. As I transition, I wanted to ask the chair if I could enter a report into the record. The report is titled, "Paid Leave is Essential for Healthy Moms and Babies." It is by the National Partnership in collaboration with the National Birth Equity Collaborative.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Without objection.

Ms. PRESSLEY. All right. So, we have spoken about the disability justice, a part of this that is often overlooked. I wanted to talk about pregnancy loss, which is also often overlooked, and other health events. Three out of four people who take paid leave do so for reasons outside of maternity or parental care.

Ms. Bigelow, why is it important to establish a national paid leave program that supports a diverse array of care needs?

Ms. BIGELOW. Like you said, the majority of people need time off to care for a family member's serious health issue or their own, and this is for things like cancer treatment, to help an aging parent recover from a fall, or to be with a child in the hospital.

Comprehensive paid leave improves health outcomes for those who need care and prevents people from having to make impossible choices between being there for their families and their own health, and their jobs and income.

It is also important for gender equity, because women are more likely to take parental leave. A policy that only covers new parents could reinforce gender discrimination.

So, finally, as the population in the work force that are both aging, a comprehensive paid leave policy is just smart economics to ensure older workers can continue working and can manage work with caring for an aging parent or loved one.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you.

And, Ms. Shabo, what are some of the policies—I want to talk about those that are receiving SSI and SSDI. What are some of the policies, Ms. Shabo, that this committee should be considering when it comes to ensuring that a paid family medical leave pro-

gram is inclusive for individuals who work and receive supplemental security income?

Chairwoman MALONEY. Your time has expired but, Ms. Shabo, you may respond to the gentlelady's question.

Ms. SHABO. I'll be brief. Thank you for the question.

I think we need to ensure that any new programs we put in place are not taking away rights to other programs for people who are working.

So, somebody who has—is on SSI or has a partial disability but is working part time, and then needs to take leave, must have that portion of their wages replaced and not be barred from accessing either of those benefits because of the receipt of the other.

The point here is to pull low-income people and people who are living paycheck to paycheck, just barely, up to the level where they are going to be able to continue to pay their bills and make ends meet and have security for themselves.

This is—this is about stabilization, financial independence, and well being.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentlewoman's time has expired.

The gentlewoman from the great state of Michigan, Mrs. Lawrence, you are now recognized.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you so much. I want to thank the panel for being here. I am so happy we are having this discussion.

I just want for the record, again, to reflect that I spent 30 years working for a Federal agency, and nothing has changed now that I am in Congress. I am a mother. I was a daughter. I am a daughter. I have family.

Just like as a Member of Congress, if any of us have a family emergency or we have a crisis, we are paid leave to be able to care for our families. Federal workers should not be exempt from that, and some of the privileged conversations I am hearing is really heartbreaking.

I am co-chair of the Women's Caucus. But one of the issues I want to emphasize while we talk about the impact of women, and pregnancy, and being the number-one caregiver in almost every family, this is a family issue.

I had a town hall where a man said, Congresswoman, almost—I will have no vacation. I have used all my vacation time to care for my children during this pandemic.

And so, I want the sensitivity of this body to think about human beings who are our Federal workers, who show up every day to do the work, who have worked as front liners during this pandemic.

Ms. Shabo, would access to paid leave help women maintain the work force participation? Now, we are struggling with this disappearance of women in the work force. Can you please talk to that?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely. I think COVID brought into sharp relief the invisible caregiving that is happening. Women bear a disproportionate share of that caregiving. But one of the reasons we need gender-equal leave is both to recognize the caregiving as it is happening today and encourage a more equitable division, going forward.

You know, something that has really struck me recently is a survey finding from Bipartisan Policy Center and Morning Consult,

which found that 38 percent of currently unemployed workers, I think as of April, said that they would be more likely to return to work sooner if their next employer provided paid family leave, and that was particularly true of unemployed parents, nearly half of whom said it would help them return to work sooner.

So, this idea that providing paid leave keeps people out of work is exactly backward. People need access to paid leave to know that they can show up, they can do their best work, and that they are going to be able to take the time that they need and then come back if they do need to take time for a caregiving need.

And that is particularly true, in this survey, of Black workers and Latinx workers who cited care giving as a reason that they had to leave the work force, compared to white workers.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I appreciate that. And the other issue that we, as Members of Congress, should understand, the fact that the emergency leave, if my child is sick, a lot of care giving facilities will say if your child has a sniffle or a cold, don't bring them in. You keep them at home and take care of that child.

I know for a fact that there are women who, if they had the ability to take leave, would maintain their employment. But because they don't and because of childcare—and this is on another platform that we must provide as a country, the sensitivity to the need for childcare in America.

The last question is to Ms. Kelley. The temporary paid leave measures for Federal employees help members. I know that. But do you believe that Federal employees who have—now have guaranteed paid parental leave have been able to take advantage of this emergency—temporary emergency paid leave, demonstrates that we need to make this permanent?

Mr. KELLEY. Did you say Ms. Kelly or Mr. Kelley?

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Kelley. I am sorry.

Mr. KELLEY. OK. All right.

So, I certainly think that, you know, it demonstrates that we need to make this permanent because, you know, we have heard more than—I mean, I don't know how many stories I have heard of how much it has been a benefit to have the temporary paid leave, right.

And so it tells us that if we were to make it permanent, then morale is definitely going to be boosted because employees are happy for the measures that the lawmakers took and considered them, considered their well being, considered their family and all those things.

It meant so much to them, and to put something permanently in place for that, I think, would only send the right message.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you, Mr. Kelley. Forgive me for using the wrong title.

Mr. KELLEY. It is OK.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I just want to say to everyone, Federal employees are the backbones of this country, and when I hear discussions about them getting too much, you don't say that when they give everything to keep this country running, our democracy, our government, our services that we provide that makes us America.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. I thank the gentelady. She yields back.

And the gentleman from the great state of California, Mr. DeSaulnier, is now recognized.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for having this hearing. Thank you for the leadership on this subject, and thank you for the manner that this hearing is being held.

I wanted to talk about the impact on regional economies and small businesses, as a former small business owner.

Mr. Sorkin and Ms. Shabo, if you could comment on this challenge of—that 70 percent of small business owners want to provide these kind of benefits, but only 15 percent are.

So, I also come from a region in the San Francisco Bay area where the state of California, local government in Northern California, and large private employers, really, were at the forefront of this.

So, we have had enough time to start to see that some of the benefits accrue to small businesses, as someone like myself, who was a retailer. There is more disposable income out in our economy that also benefits.

So, this conundrum of doing what small business wants to do, according to surveys, but the challenges they have vis-&-vis cash-flow, maybe you could comment on that, Mr. Sorkin, and your own personal experience.

And, Ms. Shabo, if you could followup with any thoughts you have.

Mr. SORKIN. Sure. Thank you, Congressman.

You know, I don't—I don't know any employees or any workers who don't want paid family and medical leave. It really comes down to the ability of small businesses to afford it, particularly in the smallest businesses and in startups.

You know, cash-flow can be a real headwind to getting that done. So, having Federal support for that is just a game changer. It is as simple as that to me. It is really—in my mind, it is a no-brainer. I don't—you know, I know a ton of businesses who would really appreciate the Federal support.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Ms. Shabo, any observations?

Ms. SHABO. Absolutely. I mean, I think what is really exciting is that we now have seven jurisdictions that have paid family and medical leave programs in place and functioning, and in the four that have been functioning the longest there are studies in each one of those that shows that businesses and, particularly, small businesses have benefited.

They have benefited in terms of productivity. They haven't seen any negative impacts. More than a majority of small business owners in each of those jurisdictions support the programs that are in place. It has improved retention. It has improved, in just the study that was done in New York recently, their ability to navigate long leaves.

You know, I really commend Mr. Sorkin for providing what his employees need on a one-to-one basis. But the reality is that many of his peer companies don't do that, can't do that even if they want to do that, and that is the reason that we need a national program.

Far from the talking points by opponents, you know, this isn't about increasing costs. It is not about diminishing flexibility. It is about ensuring that every worker can take access, can take the

time that they need to care for themselves or a loved one. Have their employees be more likely to come back to work.

And we just don't see any of the negative impacts that doubters like to say will occur. We just don't. Each state has figured out how to deal with it, and San Francisco is a great example of that.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you.

Ms. Bigelow, your organization has done some research on attracting and retaining work force. Again, my experience in the restaurant business in a high-cost area, being able to retain employees, I wanted to be able to pay them enough and also provide them with these kind of benefits.

So, your research indicates that providing for this helps small businesses. I wonder if you could comment on that.

Ms. BIGELOW. Yes, I think that that is true because, just like we have heard from Mr. Sorkin here, it is very hard to do this on your own, and what we have learned from these state programs is that this is a really great equalizer for small businesses to compete with the larger companies like in your district that already offer it, a lot of the tech companies.

And this is really a core reason why we are fighting for paid leave for all, not because all businesses should be able to provide this, and all people should be able to have it, no matter where you work.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Madam Chair, I want to thank all the witnesses and I want to thank you again. There is a challenge here and it is a short term versus, I would say, medium term.

In our experience here in Northern California, there were pressures, particularly on small businesses that had a small rate of return, like the businesses I were in.

So, you tend to hunker down and say, I just want to make my next payroll. But in the very near term, I think, within a year or two, you could see the benefits.

And last, Madam Chair, just personally, I am reminded today of wisdom from my Irish mother, who used to tell myself and my three brothers, weak men attack strong women.

So, thank you for your leadership.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman from California, the great state of California, Vice Chair Gomez, is recognized.

Representative Gomez?

[No response.]

Chairwoman MALONEY. Mr. Gomez, you are now recognized.

Mr. GOMEZ. Thank you so much, Chairwoman Maloney, for having another hearing on paid family leave. This is something that is extremely important.

I don't know why I am on two screens at once. But you guys get to get double of me.

[Laughter.]

Mr. GOMEZ. But first, let me just say, I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are starting to, like, ask why this is even necessary, right, this paid family leave, and they made so much progress during the last administration when they were—they stopped arguing about if it is needed, and they started arguing about how to get it done.

But I feel like they have backtracked a little bit. So, let us bring them back to the forefront of the fact that universal paid leave is just critical to protecting all Americans.

I think the fact is no longer up for debate. I think it is particularly true. We have seen it time and time again, and we saw the pandemic show that it is absolutely needed.

And I am proud that in California, I led one of the largest expansions of paid family leave when I was a State Assembly member. Made the wage replacement more progressive, in the fact that lower-income individuals would get a higher wage replacement so that they can actually afford to take time off, and the fact that we expanded it to include not just parental leave, but also how do you take care of a sick family member—how do you actually go and make sure that they have the time off to be there during their last days.

And I think if we care about the family, we have to care about the ability of these individuals to be there in the toughest of circumstances and not worry if they are going to have a job when they return or not.

So I want to just—to get to some questions. Ms. Shabo, can you describe how a comprehensive national paid leave policy can advance racial and gender equity?

And the reason why I am asking that is the fact that we know that lower—a lot of working-class folks, tend to be minority, tend to be—work in a lot of industries that are just part time, and they often—and it is not that they don't work.

They often work four or five jobs a week to make ends meet. But then they don't have the kind of leave that is necessary to be able to take time off.

Like my parents. When I got sick with pneumonia when I was seven, my parents had to, like, miss shifts at work, and they were working all the time. And it was something that still sits with me to this day.

So, Ms. Shabo, that was a question for you.

MS. SHABO. That is great. Thank you for bringing this up. And, you know, your story—you tell your story so eloquently and it sticks with me because it is the experience of so many other families and kids who spend more time in the hospital because they don't have a parent there to care with them to be—care for them, to be able to talk to doctors and make sure that the care that they need, that their child needs, is going to be able to be continued when they get home.

But to answer your question, you know, we have learned a lot from the state-paid leave programs. We have learned that wage replacement that is higher for low-wage workers is critically important to ensure that lower-wage workers are able to take the benefit that is provided.

We know that employment protections are critically important so that the 44 percent of workers who are not covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act are able to take the benefit that they have without fear of losing their job.

We know that the ability of people to care for more than just parents, spouses, and children is critically important, and that is why Chairwoman Maloney's FMLA expansion bill that she has been

working on for a number of years is so critical, and why the inclusive family definition in both the Neal Building an Economy for Families proposal and the American Families Plan is so important as states—as states have all recognized.

You know, importantly, I want to come back to something that Ms. Manning said earlier about the ways in which lower-wage workers may not be served by paid leave. I think we have learned a lot from how state programs have been constructed, and that gives us a tremendous opportunity when Congress does implement a Federal program to correct some of the—some of the challenges, and to ensure that all workers, whether they are lower-wage workers or middle-wage workers, are able to take the paid family and medical leave that they need, and then come back to work, to be back at businesses like Mr. Sorkin's, to be back.

And employers, you know, that we talked to all across the country, 70 percent of whom want access to paid leave, according to, you know, many national surveys of small businesses.

Mr. GOMEZ. Great, and it is true. Some folks are saying that we don't learn from how these programs are implemented. No, we have learned a lot. Wage replacement is the key. Job protection is key, and then just knowing about the programs is key.

And if we can do that, we can help people through—across the board.

And the Federal Government, because we have the ability, should play an active role in structuring a program that can be a model, that Chairwoman Maloney has led on, and I think that will help people think about it in a different way.

So, I think it is—we are moving in the right direction. We got to keep going, and I am glad Chairwoman Maloney has been leading this fight.

So with that, I yield back.

Chairwoman MALONEY. The gentleman yields back.

And that concludes the questioners, and I just want to thank all of my colleagues and all the panelists. You really did a wonderful job today answering the questions and sharing your expertise with us.

But before I close, I want to offer the ranking member an opportunity to offer any closing remarks he may have.

Ranking Member COMER, you are now recognized.

Mr. COMER. Yes, thank you, Madam Chair, and I, again, thank the witnesses for being here today.

Again, Madam Chair, this is the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, and we, certainly, have no shortage of oversight opportunities.

I am going to conclude by, once again, requesting that this committee meet in person and hold hearings on the border crisis and/or the origination of COVID-19 and/or a committee hearing on the problems with the excessive fraud in the unemployment system, specifically California.

So I think those would be three really good committee hearings. We know that we can work in a bipartisan way because we passed bipartisan postal reform out of the House Oversight Committee.

But, again, we just feel like when we are—when we are talking about workers right now, there is a shortage of workers in America

and the employers are pleading with the government to get out of the way and stop paying people not to work.

And I just—you know, to have this committee hearing at a time when our economy can't rebound, because there is a labor shortage, 8 million jobs posted in America right now, we just feel like there were better opportunities for committee hearings, moving forward.

So, Madam Chair, I yield back the balance of my time and hope that we can have some good committee hearings that the taxpayers of America want to see this committee work on.

Thank you.

Chairwoman MALONEY. Thank you. I now recognize myself.

If we have learned one thing today it is that paid leave is not, as my Republican colleagues claimed, "a perk," end quote. Workers need paid leave to recover from serious illnesses, to take care of sick children, and to deal with the sudden military deployment of a family member.

Having a seriously ill child is not a perk. Taking time to deal with active-duty deployment is not a perk. As our Nation seeks to recover from the pandemic, permanent comprehensive paid leave is essential to support workers and the families who depend on them.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Americans, including most Republicans, support paid leave. But it is not only workers and their families who gain from paid leave. Employers, including the Federal Government and the private sector, also benefit from a healthier, motivated work force.

That is why paid leave is supported by a growing number of small and large businesses. Ensuring comprehensive paid leave for Federal workers through H.R. 56—564 would help lead the way for comprehensive paid family and medical leave for all American workers.

I look forward to continuing to move this bill forward in our committee. Before I close, I would like to submit the following statements and letters for the record:

A statement in support for H.R. 564 from Tony Reardon, president of the National Treasury Employee Union; a statement of support from Karen Rainey, president of federally Employed Women; a statement of support from Jenna Johnson, the head of Patagonia, Inc.; a statement of support from the National Air Traffic Controllers Association; and a letter for H.R. 564 from the Government Managers Coalition.

Chairwoman MALONEY. In closing, I want to thank our panelists for their remarks, and I want to commend my colleagues for participating in this important conversation.

With that and without objection, all members have five legislative days within which to submit extraneous materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. I ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:05 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

